Joe Benitez's

Vol. 6

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Lady Mechanika™

Sangre

THE COMPLETE

VOLUME SIX

SIXTH VOLUME

LADY MECHANIKA™
VOLUME 6: SANGRE

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JOE BENITEZ'S
Lady Mechanika
in
SANGRE

LADY MECHANIKA CREATED BY JOE BENITEZ

Chapter One

PROLOGUE.

500 YEARS AGO, ANAHUAC CITY, IN WHAT IS NOW CALLED THE VALLEY OF MEXICO.

RUN, RUN! HE'S COMING!*

NENETL! RUN!

PAPA?

*TRANSLATED FROM NAHUATL.

GRRRRR

YOLOTLI THE JAGUAR MONSTER IS COMING!

:GASP:

RAAAWWRR!

NO, NO! STAY AWAY!

AAAAHHHH!

RAAWWR! I'S GONNA EATS YOUR BRAINS!

HA HA! TAKE HER! HA! SHE'S YOUNGER AND TASTIER! HA HA!

NO, NO! EAT PAPA! EAT PAPA!

ALL RIGHT, CHILDREN, THAT'S ENOUGH FOR TONIGHT. TIME FOR BED, MY LITTLE JAGUAR!

CAN'T CATCH ME! HEE HEE!

RAAAWWR!

:GASP!:

RAAWR!

GOT YOU!

HA HA HA! OKAY OKAY, YOU GOT ME! NOW GO ON AND GET READY FOR BED. EVEN LITTLE JAGUAR MONSTERS NEED TO LISTEN TO THEIR MAMAS!

I'S GONNA EATS YOU...

BONG BONG BONG

THE ALARM.

PROBABLY JUST RAIDERS AGAIN.

IT COULD BE THE NEWCOMERS, THE SPANIARDS.

YOU MET WITH THEM. DID THEY SEEM HOSTILE?

NO, THEY BROUGHT GIFTS AND SOUGHT ONLY TRADE, OR SO THEY SAID. BUT I DO NOT TRUST FOREIGNERS.

EITHER WAY, THE OCELOMEH GUARDS WILL HANDLE IT.

IS...IS EVERYTHING OKAY?

YES, EVERYTHING IS FINE. PAPA JUST HAS TO GO WORK.

I NEED YOU TO LOOK AFTER YOUR MAMA AND YOUR LITTLE BROTHER WHILE I'M AWAY. CAN YOU DO THAT FOR ME, NENETL?

YES, PAPA.

GOOD GIRL.

DO NOT WORRY, I WILL RETURN SOON.

PAPA! YOUR HELMET!

THANK YOU, YOLOTLI. WHO'S THE MOST FEROCIOUS WARRIOR IN ALL ANAHUAC?

I AM! I AM!

YES, YOU ARE! PROTECT THE FAMILY, MY LITTLE JAGUAR!

YOU STILL HAVE THE KNIFE I GAVE YOU?

OF COURSE. YOU NEED NOT WORRY ABOUT US!

GO ON NOW, PROTECT THE VILLAGE!

MY HEART LIES WITH YOU ALWAYS, MALI.

AND MINE WITH YOU.

COME BACK TO US, TECUANI.

ALWAYS...

AAAAAHHH!

IXTLI! WHO IS IT THIS TIME? THE TLAXCALA? WHERE ARE THEY?

WE DON'T KNOW, CAPTAIN! WE HAVE ONLY SEEN THEIR HANDIWORK. ENTIRE FAMILIES, SLAUGHTERED. EVEN THE WOMEN AND --

AAAAAHHHH

SHUNK

IXTLI!

WHAT WAS THAT?!

WHOOSH

THEY'RE TOO FAST!

AAAAHHHH

AAAAHHHH

BY THE GODS...WHAT ARE THESE CREATURES?

HOW CAN WE FIGHT SHADOOOOOWW--

THUNK

CUALLI!

:GASP!:

SHUNK

MEANWHILE...

WHOOSH

HUNGH...
HUNGH...
HUNGH...

HUNGH...
HUNGH...
HUNGH...

SCREEE

MECHANIKA CITY, ENGLAND.

KNOCK KNOCK

DR. LITTLETON?

OH! LADY MECHANIKA!

HELLO, HELLO! IT'S SO VERY NICE TO SEE YOU! COME IN, COME IN!

I WAS JUST GETTING READY TO LEAVE FOR THE DAY.

MY APOLOGIES FOR INTERRUPTING. I WON'T KEEP YOU TOO LONG.

OH, IT'S NO TROUBLE, NO TROUBLE AT ALL! HOW MAY I BE OF SERVICE?

I WISH TO BEG A FAVOR, ACTUALLY.

I'LL BE DEPARTING SHORTLY FOR THE CONTINENT AND I DON'T KNOW HOW LONG I SHALL NEED TO STAY ABROAD.

MIGHT I PREVAIL UPON YOU TO CHECK ON MR. LEWIS FROM TIME TO TIME WHILE I'M AWAY?

JUST TO MAKE CERTAIN HE'S GETTING ON PASSABLY?

OF COURSE, OF COURSE! YOU'RE LEAVING FOR A JOB?

YES. A CASE IN SPAIN.

OH? PERHAPS YOU COULD TAKE MR. LEWIS WITH YOU?

WORKING AND GETTING OUT OF THE HOUSE MIGHT HELP TO TAKE HIS MIND OFF HIS TROUBLES.

I'M AFRAID MR. LEWIS STILL REFUSES TO TALK TO ME.

UNLESS HE'S REALLY TOSSED. THEN HE JUST YELLS AT ME INCESSANTLY ABOUT HOW I RUINED HIS LIFE.

AH, I SEE.

WELL, I'M SURE HE'LL COME AROUND. HE JUST NEEDS A LITTLE TIME.

HAVE NO WORRIES, I'LL KEEP AN EYE ON HIM. PERHAPS I'LL ASK HIM AND MISS WINIFRED TO JOIN ME AND ALLIE ON AN OUTING.

THAT SOUNDS LIKE AN EXCELLENT IDEA. THANK YOU, DOCTOR. I REALLY APPRECIATE IT.

OF COURSE, LADY MECHANIKA. ANY TIME.

DR. LITTLETON...

YOU...YOU BELIEVE I ACTED APPROPRIATELY, DON'T YOU?

BY BANISHING LEWIS'S FAIRY MUSE*?

*SEE LA BELLE DAME SANS MERCI.

OH. WELL, I...I DON'T THINK I'M QUALIFIED TO JUDGE...

BUT YOU'RE A DOCTOR, RIGHT? DEDICATED TO SAVING LIVES?

WASN'T SAVING LEWIS'S LIFE MORE IMPORTANT THAN HEEDING HIS WISH TO REMAIN IN SUCH A DEADLY RELATIONSHIP?

OH, *UH*...WELL YES, OF COURSE, AS A DOCTOR I HAVE SWORN TO DO ALL I CAN TO IMPROVE THE LIVES OF MY PATIENTS.

BUT I AM ALSO FORBIDDEN TO ACT AGAINST THE PATIENT'S WISHES.

THERE IS NOTHING WORSE THAN THAT HELPLESSNESS, KNOWING YOU HAVE THE ABILITY TO SAVE SOMEONE BUT BEING FORBIDDEN TO ACT.

YOU'LL GET NO CENSURE FROM ME FOR SAVING MR. LEWIS.

THANK YOU, DOCTOR.

OH, LADY MECHANIKA!

I FORGOT TO MENTION... I'VE BEEN THINKING ABOUT THAT JOURNAL OF YOURS, THAT YOU RETRIEVED FROM BLACKPOOL'S LABS.

WERE YOU ABLE TO DECIPHER MORE OF IT?

NOTHING SUBSTANTIVE, I'M AFRAID. BUT IT SEEMS TO DESCRIBE SOME ANOMALY IN THE SUBJECT'S BLOOD.

I WAS WONDERING IF YOU MIGHT BE WILLING TO GIVE ME A SAMPLE OF ***YOUR*** BLOOD? TO SEE IF I CAN FIND THE SAME ANOMALY?

IT MIGHT HELP ME TO UNDERSTAND MORE OF THE JOURNAL'S CONTENTS.

I...

I'M AFRAID I'M NOT QUITE COMFORTABLE WITH THAT IDEA, DOCTOR...

OH, OF COURSE, OF COURSE. NO PROBLEM, NO PROBLEM AT ALL. IT WAS JUST A THOUGHT.

DON'T WORRY, I'LL LOOK AFTER MR. LEWIS WHILE YOU'RE AWAY!

PAZO DE CALVITERO, SPAIN.

GOOD DAY. I AM SEÑOR HERRERO, MAJORDOMO FOR THE BARÓN DE CALVITERO.*

*TRANSLATED FROM SPANISH.

DO YOU HAVE AN APPOINTMENT WITH THE BARÓN?

I AM LADY MECHANIKA. THE ***BARONESA*** IS EXPECTING ME.

I SEE. AND WHAT IS THE NATURE OF YOUR BUSINESS WITH HER, IF I MAY ASK?

IT IS A PRIVATE MATTER. YOU WOULD NEED TO ASK THE BARONESA.

OF COURSE. IF YOU WOULD PLEASE FOLLOW ME, YOU CAN WAIT IN THE--

LIKE WE TOLD THE OTHERS, YOUR KIND IS NOT WELCOME HERE!

WHAT ARE YOU EVEN TRYING TO BE? A WOMAN DRESSED AS A MAN? OR A MAN DRESSED AS A WOMAN?

WHAT IS THIS?!!

ANOTHER OF THE DELINCUENTES WHO WAS CORRUPTING MY SON?

I BEG YOUR PARDON!

GO! BE GONE!

LADY...LADY MECHANIKA?

LEONORA! YOU KNOW THIS WOMAN?

SHE IS FROM MY HOMELAND, FROM ENGLAND. I ASKED HER TO COME.

MY COUSINS SPOKE OF HER. SHE HAS EXPERIENCE DEALING WITH...WITH CIRCUMSTANCES SUCH AS OURS.

PADRE DOMINGUEZ IS HANDLING IT. THE SITUATION IS UNDER CONTROL.

MADAM, YOU WILL BE COMPENSATED FOR YOUR TIME AND TROUBLE, BUT YOUR JOURNEY HERE HAS BEEN FOR NAUGHT. WE WILL NOT BE NEEDING YOUR SERVICES.

BUT WHAT IF PADRE DOMINGUEZ IS NOT SUCCESSFUL? WHAT IF THE...THE PROBLEM... RETURNS?

I HAVE THE UTMOST FAITH IN PADRE DOMINGUEZ.

I CAN HEAR IT, PEDRO. I HEAR IT CALLING AT NIGHT.

IT WANTS ALEJANDRO BACK.

YOU ARE IMAGINING THINGS.

I PRAY TO GOD THAT I AM. BUT IF I AM NOT...THIS WOMAN CAN KILL IT!

THE LADY MECHANIKA IS A RENOWNED HUNTER OF SUCH CREATURES. EVEN PADRE DOMINGUEZ DOES NOT CLAIM THAT HE CAN DESTROY THE DEMON, ONLY BANISH IT.

WHAT IS TO STOP IT FROM RETURNING? SHOULD WE NOT TRY EVERYTHING POSSIBLE TO ENSURE OUR SON'S SAFETY?

PLEASE, PEDRO. HE'S OUR SON.

I DO NOT UNDERSTAND WHAT A ***MERE WOMAN*** COULD POSSIBLY DO TO HELP, BUT IF YOU WISH TO HIRE HER, I WILL NOT FORBID IT.

BUT MIND SHE DOES NOT INTERFERE WITH PADRE DOMINGUEZ!

THANK YOU, PEDRO.

HERRERO! HAVE ROSA PREPARE A ROOM FOR OUR GUEST! AND HAVE THE FOOTMEN BRING HER TRUNKS!

AT ONCE, BARÓN.

LADY MECHANIKA, THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR COMING.

MY APOLOGIES FOR THE CONFUSION. I...I SHOULD HAVE TOLD MY HUSBAND I HAD INVITED YOU.

THE SITUATION HAS US RATHER... UNSETTLED.

YOU BELIEVE SOME DEMONIC ENTITY IS PREYING ON YOUR SON?

I MUST CONFESS I AM NO EXPERT ON DEMONOLOGY. YOUR PRIEST MAY VERY WELL BE BETTER EQUIPPED TO DEAL WITH THE SITUATION THAN I.

I AM NOT SO CERTAIN. LET US SIT, AND I'LL EXPLAIN.

PADRE DOMINGUEZ THINKS HE HAS SUCCEEDED IN EXORCISING THE DEMON, BUT I FEAR THE DANGER IS NOT YET OVER.

HE PERFORMED AN EXORCISM?

YES. AND I BELIEVE THE DEMON HAS INDEED BEEN CAST OUT OF MY SON, ALEJANDRO, BUT SOMETHING ELSE IS OUT THERE.

I HEAR IT BY THE WINDOWS OUTSIDE HIS ROOM AT NIGHT, WHISPERING. THE DEMON TAKEN SHAPE, OR SOME EVIL FIEND IT COMMANDS... I DO NOT KNOW WHAT IT IS, BUT I DO KNOW WHAT IT WANTS.

IT WANTS MY SON.

PRIESTS WORK WITHIN THE SPIRITUAL REALMS, NOT WITH DEMONS MADE FLESH. BUT YOU...YOU HAVE FOUGHT SUCH MONSTERS.

MY COUSINS VIOLA AND SEBASTIAN HAVE HUNTED WITH YOU BEFORE. THEY SAY YOU CAN KILL ANYTHING.

I DO NOT WISH TO GIVE YOU ANY FALSE ASSURANCES, BARONESA. I HAVE HAD MY SHARE OF FAILURES.

BUT YOU WILL TRY?

I WILL TRY.

YOU HAVE ONLY HEARD THE CREATURE? YOU HAVE NOT SEEN IT?

NO. WHENEVER I GATHER ENOUGH COURAGE TO DRAW THE CURTAINS AND LOOK OUTSIDE, I SEE NOTHING THERE.

MY HUSBAND THINKS I AM IMAGINING THINGS, BUT I KNOW I AM NOT.

I SHALL NEED TO QUESTION YOUR SON, ASK HIM WHAT HE KNOWS OF THIS DEMON.

I...I'M AFRAID THAT ISN'T POSSIBLE.

HE'S...SLEEPING. WE HAVEN'T BEEN ABLE TO WAKE HIM.

HE WAS INJURED? MAY I SEE HIM, AND HIS ROOM?

I...YES, OF COURSE. COME WITH ME.

PADRE DOMINGUEZ, THIS IS THE LADY MECHANIKA. I'VE HIRED HER TO HELP PROTECT ALEJANDRO. MAY WE HAVE A FEW MINUTES WITH HIM?

OF COURSE, BARONESA.

A PLEASURE TO MAKE YOUR ACQUAINTANCE. MAY I INQUIRE AS TO THE NATURE OF YOUR CALLING?

I AM A... HUNTER.

OH. I SEE.

VERY WELL THEN. BARONESA, I SHALL WAIT OUTSIDE IN THE HALL.

MADAM.

I'VE BEEN SITTING WITH HIM EVERY NIGHT. HE LOVES POETRY.

THE BARÓN DOESN'T QUITE APPROVE OF ME ENCOURAGING SUCH WOMANLY PURSUITS.

BUT HE'S MY DARLING BOY.

WE'VE BEEN READING WHITMAN, ONE OF HIS FAVORITES.

WHY IS HE RESTRAINED?

THE DEMON HAD HOLD OF HIM, GAVE HIM SUPERHUMAN STRENGTH AND FORCED HIM INTO UNNATURAL ACTS.

UNNATURAL ACTS?

HE ATTACKED HIS FATHER, AND EVEN STRUCK AT ME. HE WAS NOT THE GENTLE GOD-LOVING BOY I RAISED.

WERE THERE ANY SIGNS OF DEMONIC POSSESSION OTHER THAN THE STRENGTH AND AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR?

HE...HIS EYES TOOK ON AN UNHOLY SHADE. THEY GLOWED WITH MALEVOLENCE.

I SEE NO ABNORMALITIES IN HIS EYES.

NO, THEY BECAME HUMAN AGAIN ONCE THE DEMON WAS CAST OUT.

AND THESE MARKS? THEY LOOK LIKE BURNS.

A SIDE EFFECT FROM THE EXORCISM DEVICE.

THE WHAT?

IT WAS THE ONE THING THAT FINALLY WORKED.

THE PRAYERS AND INCANTATIONS, THE CRUCIFIXES AND HOLY WATER...NOTHING SEEMED TO AFFECT THE DEMON. NOTHING UNTIL PADRE DOMINGUEZ APPLIED THE DEVICE.

THIS DEVICE?

YES. YOU'VE SEEN ONE BEFORE?

I HAVE, BUT IT IS NOT A PART OF THE SANCTIONED RITES OF EXORCISM. IT IS A ***DANGEROUS*** EXPERIMENTAL PROCEDURE!

DID THE GOOD PADRE EXPLAIN HOW THE DEVICE WORKS? IT USES GALVANISM, APPLYING ELECTRO-STATIC VOLTAGES TO THE BRAIN!

UNSCRUPULOUS DOCTORS USE IT-- ***ILLEGALLY***--TO TRY TO MODIFY UNDESIRABLE BEHAVIORS IN THEIR PATIENTS.

WHERE DID YOU FIND THIS ***PADRE*** DOMINGUEZ?

HE...HE IS A WELL RESPECTED PRIEST OF THE CHURCH! AN ORDAINED EXORCIST!

PERHAPS HIS METHODS WERE SOMEWHAT UNORTHODOX, BUT THEY SUCCEEDED!

SUCCEEDED IN SHOCKING YOUR SON INTO A COMATOSE STATE!

BARONESA, I HAVE FOUND NO SIGNS OF A DEMONIC ENTITY HERE. YOUR SON DOESN'T NEED AN EXORCIST, HE NEEDS A DOCTOR.

NO, IN THIS YOU ARE MISTAKEN, LADY MECHANIKA. YOU DIDN'T SEE HIM! HE WAS NOT HIMSELF.

THE THINGS HE SAID AND DID...NO DECENT CHRISTIAN COULD ACT THUSLY.

ADOLESCENTS OFTEN GO THROUGH DRASTIC BEHAVIORAL CHANGES AT HIS AGE --

THAT WAS NOT THE CASE HERE! HE WAS UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF SOMETHING SUPERNATURAL, SOMETHING EVIL.

HE WAS UNBELIEVABLY STRONG, STRONGER EVEN THAN YOU, LADY MECHANIKA. AND HIS EYES WERE RED, RED AS BLOOD.

I AM NOT THE ONLY ONE WHO SAW IT. MY HUSBAND SAW IT. PADRE DOMINGUEZ, SEÑOR HERRERO AND THE FOOTMEN WHO HELPED US TO RESTRAIN HIM...ASK THEM! THEY ALL SAW IT!

HE--

LEONORA!

WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THIS?

PADRE DOMINGUEZ SAYS YOU SENT HIM AWAY. I TOLD YOU NOT TO DISTURB HIS PRAYERS!

LADY MECHANIKA NEEDED TO SEE ALEJANDRO, TO SEE THE ROOM WHERE I'VE HEARD THE CREATURE.

BARÓN, WAS--

=GASP!= DEMONIA!

PADRE! THE DEMON HAS RETURNED!

WHAT--

HER EYES! LOOK AT HER EYES! THEY ARE RED, JUST LIKE ALEJANDRO'S WHEN HE WAS POSSESSED BY THE DEMON!

SPLASH

BEGONE, UNHOLY SPIRIT!

:SIGH:

NO, NO, PEDRO! SHE IS NO DEMON! HER EYES ARE ALWAYS RED, AN AFFLICTION OF HER UNIQUE PHYSIOLOGY, HER MECHANICAL PROSTHETICS.

IT IS *UNNATURAL!*

IT IS WHY SHE CAN FIGHT SUCH CREATURES! MY COUSINS SPOKE OF IT, YOU REMEMBER?

PLEASE, PEDRO, SHE IS NO DANGER TO US. BUT SHE MAY RID US OF THE TRUE DANGER, THE TRUE DEMON!

ASK PADRE DOMINGUEZ TO RETURN TO HIS PRAYERS.

WE SHALL LEAVE IN A MINUTE.

I APOLOGIZE. THE BARÓN IS SET IN HIS WAYS AND DOES NOT RESPOND WELL TO THINGS THAT ARE NEW OR UNUSUAL.

I CAN SEE THAT.

PLEASE, LADY MECHANIKA. THERE IS A DEMON HERE, I PROMISE YOU. SPEAK WITH THE OTHERS. THEY ALL SAW IT TOO.

YOU SAY HIS EYES WERE RED LIKE MINE?

YES. JUST THE IRISES. THE REST OF HIS EYES WERE WHITE, NOT BLACK, BUT THE IRISES WERE AS RED AS YOURS.

VERY WELL. LET ME SPEAK WITH YOUR HOUSEHOLD, ASK THEM WHAT THEY SAW.

THANK YOU, LADY MECHANIKA, THANK YOU!

DOÑA ROSA, OUR HOUSEKEEPER, WILL SHOW YOU TO YOUR ROOM. SHE CAN DIRECT YOU TO ANYONE ELSE WITH WHOM YOU WISH TO SPEAK.

HERE IS YOUR ROOM, SEÑORITA. YOUR TRUNKS HAVE ALREADY BEEN BROUGHT UP, AND I CAN HAVE A BATH DRAWN, IF YOU'D LIKE?

NO, DOÑA ROSA, THANK YOU. BUT I WOULD LIKE TO ASK YOU SOME QUESTIONS ABOUT ALEJANDRO.

THE BARONESA BELIEVES HER SON WAS SUFFERING FROM SOME AFFLICTION THAT CAUSED HIM TO ACT STRANGELY. DID ***YOU*** EVER WITNESS ANY QUEER BEHAVIOR?

YOU MEAN WHEN THE ***DEMON*** TOOK HIM. IT WAS THE MOST TERRIFYING THING I HAVE EVER SEEN!

MY SWEET BOY TRANSFORMED INTO A BEAST, YELLING ALL SORTS OF NONSENSE AND PROFANITIES, AND VIOLENTLY STRONG!

HE SHOVED PADRE AMADEO HALFWAY ACROSS THE ROOM! OUR LOCAL PRIEST, NOT THE EXORCIST. THE KINDLIEST OLD MAN IN THE WORLD, WHO BAPTIZED HIM, GAVE HIM HIS FIRST COMMUNION!

THE BOY I KNEW WOULD NEVER HAVE RAISED A HAND TO HIM!

OH, AND HIS EYES! THE DEVIL'S EYES, AS RED AS YOURS, IF YOU'LL PARDON ME FOR SAYING SO. THE BARONESA WARNED ME, SO I WOULDN'T TAKE FRIGHT.

WHEN DID ALL THIS BEGIN? THE STRENGTH, THE VIOLENCE, THE EYES...DID IT HAPPEN GRADUALLY OR ALL OF A SUDDEN?

I COULD NOT SAY, SEÑORITA. HE'D BEEN AWAY AT UNIVERSITY.

THE BARÓN AND BARONESA, THEY HEARD DISTURBING RUMORS AND WENT THERE TO BRING HIM HOME.

RUMORS OF VIOLENT BEHAVIOR?

WELL, NOT EXACTLY. THERE WERE RUMORS THAT HE...OH, I REALLY SHOULD NOT SPEAK OF IT...

DOÑA ROSA, ANYTHING YOU SAY WILL REMAIN IN THIS ROOM, I PROMISE, AND SOMETHING YOU TELL ME MAY END UP HELPING ALEJANDRO.

IT COULD MEAN THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH.

WELL, THERE WERE RUMORS THAT ALEJANDRO HAD THE...

...THE *URANIAN DISEASE.*

URANIAN?

YOU KNOW...

...*HE LIKES BOYS.*

WHAT DO YOU...*OH!* YOU MEAN...

OH. I SEE...

THE BARÓN, WELL, HE WENT INTO A RAGE. THERE WAS AN INCIDENT, YOU SEE, WHEN HE WAS BUT A CHILD.

AN UNCLE OF HIS WAS DISCOVERED WITH...WITH THE DISEASE, AND CAST OUT OF THE FAMILY, NEVER TO BE SPOKEN OF AGAIN. IT WAS QUITE A SCANDAL.

THE BARÓN HAS HARBORED A GREAT HATRED FOR SUCH DEVIANTS EVER SINCE. HE WOULD NEVER ALLOW SUCH THINGS TO BE SAID ABOUT HIS OWN SON.

THE POOR *MUCHACHO*. HE WAS ALWAYS A GENTLE BOY. TOO INNOCENT, AND IGNORANT OF THE EVILS OF THE WORLD.

HE WOULD HAVE BEEN EASY PREY FOR DEVIANT SINNERS.

DID ALEJANDRO EVER EXHIBIT SUCH...TENDENCIES BEFORE HE LEFT FOR UNIVERSITY?

WELL, TRUTH BE TOLD, I ALWAYS SUSPECTED...NOT THAT HE EVER DID ANYTHING IMPROPER, MIND YOU. HE WAS ALWAYS A GOOD BOY, VERY WELL BEHAVED, ALWAYS TRYING SO HARD TO LIVE UP TO HIS FATHER'S EXPECTATIONS.

AND DID HE? LIVE UP TO THE BARÓN'S EXPECTATIONS?

THE BARÓN CAN BE VERY DEMANDING, AND RIGHTLY SO. ALEJANDRO IS HIS ONLY SON, AND MUST BECOME STRONGER IF HE IS TO INHERIT AND MANAGE THE ESTATE.

BUT ALEJANDRO TOOK MORE AFTER HIS MOTHER, QUIET AND DOCILE. AND HE WAS ALWAYS SO SMALL, POOR LAMB. THE BARONESA DOTED ON HIM, BUT THE BARÓN COMPLAINED SHE WAS JUST MAKING HIM SOFT.

OH, NO, I DON'T THINK...WHAT ABOUT THE EYES? AND WOULDN'T PADRE DOMINGUEZ KNOW WHETHER OR NOT THERE WAS A DEMON?

YES, WOULDN'T HE?

IT SEEMED TO ME HE WAS... ***UNHAPPY,*** THE YEARS BEFORE HE LEFT FOR UNIVERSITY.

DOÑA ROSA, DO YOU BELIEVE ALEJANDRO WAS ***TRULY*** POSSESSED BY A DEMON? IS IT NOT POSSIBLE HE WAS SIMPLY REBELLING AGAINST HIS TOO DEMANDING FATHER?

THAT EVENING...

GAWK

OH BLOODY HELL!

CRACK

LEWIS ALWAYS MAKES IT LOOK SO EASY!

WELL, I'VE WORKED PLENTY OF JOBS WITHOUT HIM OR HIS GADGETS. AND REALLY, I PREFER WORKING ALONE ANYWAY.

SURELY I CAN HANDLE THIS ONE ON MY OWN. I'M NOT EVEN CERTAIN THERE'S REALLY A CASE HERE.

EVERY MEMBER OF THE HOUSEHOLD SWEARS THEY WITNESSED THE ABERRANT STRENGTH AND VIOLENCE. BUT SUCH THINGS COULD HAVE NATURAL CAUSES.

THE BARONESA, AT LEAST, GENUINELY SEEMS TO BELIEVE A DEMON ATTACKED HER SON.

BUT THE BARÓN AND THE PRIEST...

...I AM NOT SO CERTAIN.

EVEN THE EYES COULD JUST BE REFLECTIONS FROM THE CANDLELIGHT. AND PEOPLE BELIEVE WHAT THEY'RE TOLD TO BELIEVE.

REGARDLESS OF WHETHER THEY BELIEVE IT TO BE TRUE OR NOT, REGARDLESS OF WHETHER THERE IS AN ACTUAL DEMONIC PRESENCE OR NOT...

I WILL NOT CONDONE ILLICIT AND DANGEROUS PROCEDURES BEING PERFORMED ON UNWILLING SUBJECTS.

I'VE EXPERIENCED QUITE ENOUGH OF THAT MYSELF.

HMMM...A LINE OF SALT. PROTECTION AGAINST DEMONS.

AND WHAT HAVE WE HERE? A SERVANT SNEAKING OUT IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT?

PERHAPS JUST MEETING SOMEONE FOR AN INNOCENT RENDEZVOUS, BUT...

...I HAVE A SUSPICIOUS MIND...

WHOOOSH

WHOOOSH

:GASP!:

WHOOOSH

LUCIAN! RUN! SHE'S HERE! SHE'S HERE!

BOLLOCKS! HOW DID HE SEE ME?

AND HOW IS HE RUNNING SO BLOODY FAST?

MADRINA...

LUCIAN!

HUNGH...
HUNGH...

WHOOSH

HOW THE...?

WHAT THE BLOODY HELL WAS THAT?!

LA MADRINA! LA MADRINA IS HERE!

LUCIAN! RUUUU--

WHOOOOSH

WHOOOSH

:GASP!:

HUH...I GUESS THERE IS A CASE HERE AFTER ALL...

Chapter Two

PROLOGUE

HUNGH... HUNGH...

TECUANI!

MALI... HUNGH... HUNGH...

HURRY... WE HAVE TO LEAVE!

PAPA!

YOU'RE HURT!

NO... HUNGH...NOT BADLY.

THE BLOOD...IT ISN'T MINE.

MY MEN... IXTLI AND CUALLI WERE SLAUGHTERED RIGHT IN FRONT OF ME.

THEY'RE KILLING EVERYONE... WOMEN, CHILDREN. NO ONE IS SAFE.

WE NEED TO LEAVE THE CITY. NOW.

THE SPANISH TRADERS DID THIS?

NO.

DEMONS.

DEMONS!

CREATURES FASTER THAN THE EYE CAN SEE.

SHADOWS WE CANNOT FIGHT.

THEY LEAVE A TRAIL OF BLOOD AND CORPSES IN THEIR WAKE.

THE CAPITAL.

WHERE WILL WE GO?

WE HAVE TO WARN THE EMPEROR!

WHOOSH

PAPA! THERE'S SOMETHING IN THE TREES!

THE DEMONS!

WHOOSH

RUN!

THE PRIESTS MUST KNOW WHAT THESE CREATURES ARE AND HOW TO FIGHT THEM.

THE PRIESTS FELL TO THEM TOO.

WE SHALL NEED TO SEEK HELP FROM THE DARK ONES, THE SORCERERS OF MICTLAN.

GO!

I'LL CUT THE BRIDGE!

CHUK

CHOK

CHUK

CHOK

WHOOOSH

GASP!

WHOOSH

GO! RUN!

YOU CANNOT HAVE THEM, DEMON!

WHOOSH

UNGH...

SHUNK!

SHUNK!

THUNK!

TECUANI!

PAPA!

NOOOOO!

SPAIN.

WHY WOULD ONE OF *MY* PEOPLE BE OUT HERE IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT?

I TOOK THE LIBERTY OF CHECKING WITH THE STAFF, SIR. EVERYONE IS ACCOUNTED FOR.

WHOEVER THIS BOY MIGHT BE, HE IS *NOT* ONE OF OURS.

THE BODY IS OVER HERE.

RED EYES! THE MARK OF THE DEMON!

WE MUST NOTIFY THE VATICAN, AND WARN THE LOCALS TO LOOK FOR DEMONIC SIGNS! WHO KNOWS HOW FAR THE DEMON'S CORRUPTION HAS SPREAD?

THAT WILL ONLY SERVE TO INCITE A PANIC, DON PEDRO. MORE INNOCENTS COULD BE HARMED.

WE NEED TO UNDERSTAND THE TRUE NATURE OF WHAT WE ARE FACING HERE. THERE IS MORE TO THIS THAN MERE SPIRITUAL POSSESSION.

IS DEMONIC POSSESSION A TRIVIALITY IN YOUR WORLD, DAMA MECHANIKA?

THE DANGER IS NOT MERE PHYSICAL HARM BUT THE CORRUPTION OF THE IMMORTAL SOUL!

I MUST LEAVE THE CARE OF SOULS IN THE MORE CAPABLE HANDS OF THE CLERGY.

MY EXPERTISE LIES ONLY WITH MUNDANE MATTERS -- WITH MONSTERS, AND MURDER.

THIS BOY IS NOT ONE OF YOUR SERVANTS? IS HE FROM THE VILLAGE?

I DO NOT RECOGNIZE HIM.

I BELIEVE HE WAS THE YOUNG MAN WHO STOPPED BY THE HOUSE TWO DAYS AGO, ASKING AFTER ALEJANDRO.

HE SAID HE WAS A FRIEND FROM THE UNIVERSITY.

I TOLD HIM ALEJANDRO WAS ILL AND UNABLE TO RECEIVE VISITORS, BUT HE BECAME BELLIGERENT AND ACCUSED US OF LOCKING ALEJANDRO AWAY FROM HIS FRIENDS.

I HAD HIM... ***ESCORTED*** OFF THE ESTATE.

THESE YOUNG MEN, SINNERS AND ***DELINCUENTES,*** THEY ARE EASY PREY FOR THE FORCES OF EVIL.

HE CALLED OUT TO SOMEONE HERE. LUCIAN. ANOTHER OF ALEJANDRO'S FRIENDS?

I AM NOT FAMILIAR WITH ANYONE OF THAT NAME.

WHAT OF... ***LA MADRINA?***

NO.

LA MADRINA? WHERE DID YOU HEAR THAT?

THE BOY SAID IT, WHILE HE WAS RUNNING. "*LA MADRINA* IS HERE."

YOU'VE HEARD THE NAME BEFORE?

IT IS A SILLY SUPERSTITION FROM THE NEW WORLD. *LA MADRINA,* THE GODMOTHER.

A BOGEYMAN THAT PEASANTS USE TO SCARE THEIR CHILDREN. BEHAVE OR *LA MADRINA* WILL TAKE YOU.

A BOGEYMAN? LIKE A MONSTER...

...OR A ***DEMON?***

IGLESIA DE SANTA MARÍA DE CALVITERO, LATER THAT MORNING...

THANK YOU FOR SEEING ME, PADRE AMADEO. I WANTED TO ASK YOU A FEW QUESTIONS ABOUT THE BARÓN'S SON.

YOU ARE THE DEMON HUNTER HIRED BY THE BARONESA.

WORD TRAVELS FAST.

IN SMALL TOWNS SUCH AS THIS, YES. HOW CAN I HELP?

YOU WERE PRESENT WHEN THE BARÓN AND BARONESA BROUGHT ALEJANDRO HOME FROM UNIVERSITY?

YES. HIS PARENTS WISHED FOR ME TO HAVE A WORD WITH HIM.

ABOUT HIS ***UNNATURAL*** BEHAVIOR, WITH OTHER MEN?

MY APOLOGIES, BUT IT WOULD NOT BE APPROPRIATE FOR ME TO DISCUSS IT.

OF COURSE. IN ANY CASE, YOU DISCOVERED A GREATER PROBLEM THAN ALEJANDRO'S BEHAVIOR.

YES. THE DEMON.

YOU HAVE NO DOUBTS THAT ALEJANDRO WAS UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF A SUPERNATURAL ENTITY?

I AM ABSOLUTELY CERTAIN OF IT. I HAVE NEVER SEEN ANYTHING LIKE IT IN ALL MY MANY YEARS SERVING THE CHURCH. HIS EYES, HIS STRENGTH, HIS VOICE... AND THE VIOLENCE...

HAVE YOU EVER ENCOUNTERED A TRUE DEMON, DAMA MECHANIKA? IT IS TERRIFYING!

YOU WOULD UNDERSTAND HOW THERE COULD BE NO DOUBT ALEJANDRO WAS POSSESSED.

WHAT IS THE PROPER PROCEDURE FOR HANDLING SUCH A CASE, PADRE?

IT IS FAR BEYOND MY CAPABILITIES AND EXPERIENCE. I SENT IMMEDIATELY FOR AN EXORCIST.

SO THIS PADRE DOMINGUEZ IS TRULY AN ORDAINED EXORCIST?

WHY, YES, OF COURSE. HE WAS SENT BY THE ARCHBISHOP HIMSELF. WHY WOULD YOU QUESTION IT?

I HAVE CONCERNS ABOUT HIS SEEMINGLY UNORTHODOX METHODS. HE USED A GALVANISM DEVICE ON THE BOY.

GALVANISM?

THE APPLICATION OF ELECTRIC SHOCKS TO THE BRAIN.

I HAVE NEVER HEARD OF IT BEING USED AS PART OF AN EXORCISM, BUT IT HAS BEEN USED TO FORCIBLY MODIFY A PERSON'S BEHAVIOR...

...UNDESIRABLE BEHAVIORS SUCH AS ALEJANDRO'S ALLEGED SINFUL THOUGHTS TOWARD MEN.

I SEE. YOU SUSPECT PADRE DOMINGUEZ WAS USING THIS...THIS GALVANISM TO FORCE ALEJANDRO INTO BEHAVING A CERTAIN WAY? NO PRIEST WOULD EVER DO SUCH A THING.

EVEN IF, HYPOTHETICALLY, HE DID HAVE LUSTFUL THOUGHTS ABOUT OTHER MEN, SUCH FEELINGS ARE NOT A SIN. JUST AS IT IS NOT A SIN TO FEEL GREED OR ENVY OR ANGER.

THESE THOUGHTS ARE NORMAL, ALL HUMANS HAVE THEM. IT IS ONLY IF WE INDULGE IN OUR BASER, SELFISH DESIRES AND ACT UPON THEM THAT IT WOULD BE CONSIDERED SINFUL.

I DOUBT HIS FATHER THE BARÓN WOULD AGREE. HE SEEMS TO HAVE A GREAT FEAR AND HATRED OF THINGS HE CONSIDERS ***UNNATURAL***-- MYSELF INCLUDED.

I DON'T THINK HE WOULD BALK AT FORCING HIS SON TO COMPLY WITH HIS WISHES.

BE THAT AS IT MAY, NO ORDAINED PRIEST WOULD SANCTION IT.

I AM CERTAIN IF PADRE DOMINGUEZ USED THIS TECHNIQUE, IT WAS NEEDED TO CAST OUT THE DEMON, TO ***SHOCK*** THE ENTITY OUT OF ALEJANDRO'S BODY.

IT IS A RATHER EXTREME PROCEDURE. THE BOY IS GRAVELY INJURED BECAUSE OF IT. I FEAR HE MAY BE DYING.

FIGHTING A DEMON IS A RATHER EXTREME SITUATION. EXORCISMS ARE NEITHER EASY NOR TIDY.

ONCE A DEMON TAKES HOLD OF A PERSON, IT IS VERY DIFFICULT TO EXPEL. AND SADLY, THE VICTIM'S BODY OFTEN CANNOT SURVIVE THE PROCESS.

I HOPE THAT IS NOT THE CASE FOR ALEJANDRO, BUT WE MUST USE EVERY MEANS NECESSARY TO DEFEAT THE DEMON AND AT LEAST SAVE HIS SOUL.

HAVE YOU NEVER NEEDED TO TAKE EXTREME MEASURES WHEN HUNTING YOUR MONSTERS?

STUDENT QUARTERS, THE UNIVERSITY OF SALAMANCA.

PARDON ME, ARE ANY OF YOU ACQUAINTED WITH ALEJANDRO VELASCO? HE'S A STUDENT HERE.

SORRY, DON'T KNOW HIM.

HEY! ANYONE KNOW AN ALEJANDRO VELASCO?

WHO?

ISN'T HE THE ONE WHOSE PARENTS CAME BY LAST WEEK?

OH, RIGHT. 17B. HE'S NOT HERE. HIS PARENTS TOOK HIM AWAY.

COULD YOU PERCHANCE DIRECT ME TO ANY OF HIS FRIENDS? I BELIEVE HE KNEW SOMEONE NAMED LUCIAN?

ANYONE KNOW A LUCIAN?

SORRY!

NOPE.

17B WASN'T AROUND HERE MUCH.

I THINK HE WAS USUALLY OUT WITH HIS GIRLFRIEND.

I'M SORRY, DID YOU SAY HIS *GIRLFRIEND?*

THE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY.

ZAYDA ELHUYAR?

YEP, I'M ZAYDA! I'LL BE RIGHT DOWN!

I'VE COME FROM PAZO DE CALVITERO--

OH! ALEJANDRO! IS HE OKAY?

I KNOW HIS PARENTS TOOK HIM BACK HOME AND I TRIED SENDING TELEGRAMS BUT NO ONE HAS ANSWERED ANY OF THEM.

HE'S BEEN INJURED--

WHAT? INJURED! HOW BADLY? WHAT HAPPENED?

I'LL TAKE A TRIP OUT THERE RIGHT AWAY!

HIS PARENTS AREN'T ALLOWING ANY VISITORS AT THIS TIME, BUT I COULD DELIVER A MESSAGE IF YOU'D LIKE.

THEY HIRED ME TO INVESTIGATE THE SITUATION, TO FIND OUT WHO ATTACKED HIM.

HE WAS *ATTACKED?!*

WHY? BY WHOM? OH, WAIT, OF COURSE YOU DON'T KNOW. YOU'RE TRYING TO FIND THAT OUT. SORRY!

WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP?

DO YOU KNOW IF HE WAS HAVING ANY DIFFICULTIES OR TROUBLE WITH ANYONE? ANY RIVALRIES?

NO, NOTHING LIKE THAT AT ALL. HE'S QUIET, A LITTLE ON THE SHY SIDE. HE NEVER GOT INTO ANY TROUBLE.

I CAN'T THINK OF ANYONE WHO'D WANT TO HURT HIM.

DID HE EVER EXPRESS ANY INTEREST IN SPIRITUALISM? OR THE OCCULT?

SPIRITUALISM? YOU MEAN SPEAKING TO THE DEAD AND SUCH? NO, NOT THAT I EVER HEARD. IT DOESN'T SEEM LIKE A SUBJECT HE'D BE INTERESTED IN.

I GUESS HE HAD BEEN READING A LOT OF GOTHIC STORIES OF LATE --*CARMILLA, THE VAMPYRE,* GOETHE'S *FAUST* -- BUT I WOULDN'T CALL THAT A PARTICULAR INTEREST IN THE OCCULT.

WAS HE ATTACKED BY...BY SOME KIND OF SATAN WORSHIPPERS?

NO, NO, NOTHING SO GRUESOME. THERE WERE JUST SOME UNUSUAL CIRCUMSTANCES REGARDING HIS INJURIES.

WHAT ABOUT ALEJANDRO'S FRIENDS? A YOUNG MAN WITH WHITE HAIR STOPPED BY THE *PAZO* ASKING FOR HIM.

OH, I KNOW WHO YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT. HE CALLS HIMSELF OSIRIS, THOUGH I'M FAIRLY CERTAIN THAT'S NOT HIS REAL NAME. HE'S A BIT OF A PRETENTIOUS *FRESA.*

ALEJANDRO'S BEEN SPENDING A LOT OF TIME WITH A NEW GROUP OF FRIENDS LATELY. THEY'RE NOT FROM THE UNIVERSITY.

I MET SOME OF THEM ONCE WHEN I RAN INTO HIM AT THE PLAZA. THEY ALL BELONG TO SOME FANCY CLUB IN TOWN.

I THINK ALEJANDRO MAY HAVE MET SOMEONE THERE.

MET SOMEONE? YOU MEAN A ROMANTIC INTEREST? I THOUGHT YOU AND HE...

ME AND ALEJANDRO? OH, NO, WE'RE JUST FRIENDS! A MERE PROFESSOR'S DAUGHTER IS NO PROPER MATCH FOR A BARÓN'S SON.

AND BESIDES, HE NEVER LOOKED AT ME THAT WAY, THE WAY I CATCH SOME OF THE OTHER UNIVERSITY BOYS LOOKING.

WHAT MAKES YOU THINK HE WAS COURTING SOMEONE?

HE WAS ACTING DIFFERENT. HAPPIER, I THINK.

DRESSING DIFFERENT TOO, LIKE HIS NEW FRIENDS. WEARING DARK SPECTACLES ALL THE TIME, EVEN AT NIGHT. SOME KIND OF FASHION STATEMENT, I SUPPOSE.

THEY WERE WEIRD BUT HARMLESS. HE WAS SKIPPING CLASS A LOT THOUGH. I THOUGHT THAT WAS WHY HIS PARENTS TOOK HIM AWAY.

WOULD YOU HAPPEN TO KNOW THE NAME OR LOCATION OF THIS CLUB?

SHORTLY...

KNOCK KNOCK

YEAH?

GOOD EVENING. I'M TRYING TO HELP A FRIEND, ALEJANDRO VELASCO? I WAS TOLD HE FREQUENTED THIS CLUB.

MAYBE. MAYBE NOT.

I HAVE URGENT NEWS REGARDING A MEMBER OF YOUR CLUB. IT IS IMPERATIVE I SPEAK WITH LUCIAN. IS HE HERE?

I DUNNO.

DO YOU KNOW OSIRIS?

MAYBE.

OSIRIS IS DEAD.

WHAT?!

THAT'S NOT...

HEY! THIS LADY SAYS OSIRIS IS DEAD!

WAIT! YOU CAN'T GO IN THERE!

WATCH ME.

LA MAAADRINAAAAA!!

OSIRIS? DEAD? DON'T BE RIDICU--

LA MADRINA?

IT CAN'T BE!

LET'S GET OUT OF HERE!

AAAAH

NOOO

:GASP!:

DEAR LORD...IT'S A BLOODY MASSACRE!

THEY LOOK LIKE THEY WERE ALL STRUCK DOWN COMPLETELY UNAWARE, IN THE MIDDLE OF WHATEVER THEY WERE DOING...

AAAHHHHHHH!!

AAAHHHH

I SAW THAT THE CREATURE WAS FAST BUT *THIS*...

ALL THIS HAPPENED IN THE FEW MINUTES I WAS DOWNSTAIRS?

aaaaaa

NO...

AAAAHHH!!

NO NO NO NO...

NO... HUNGH...HUNGH... HUNGH...

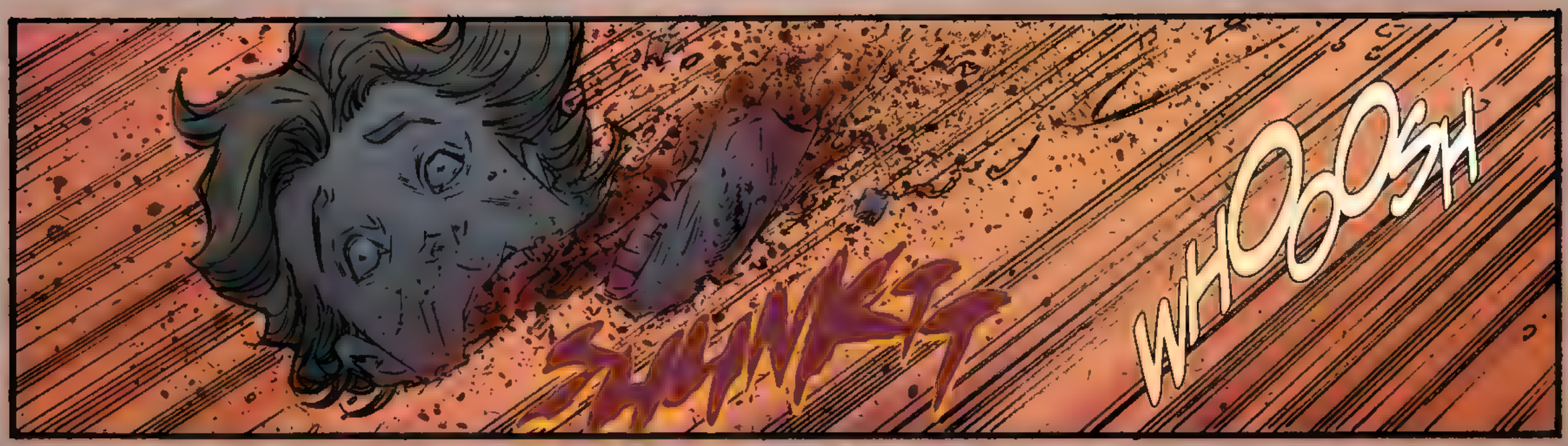
NO...NO...

IT'S ALL RIGHT, I'M HERE TO HELP.

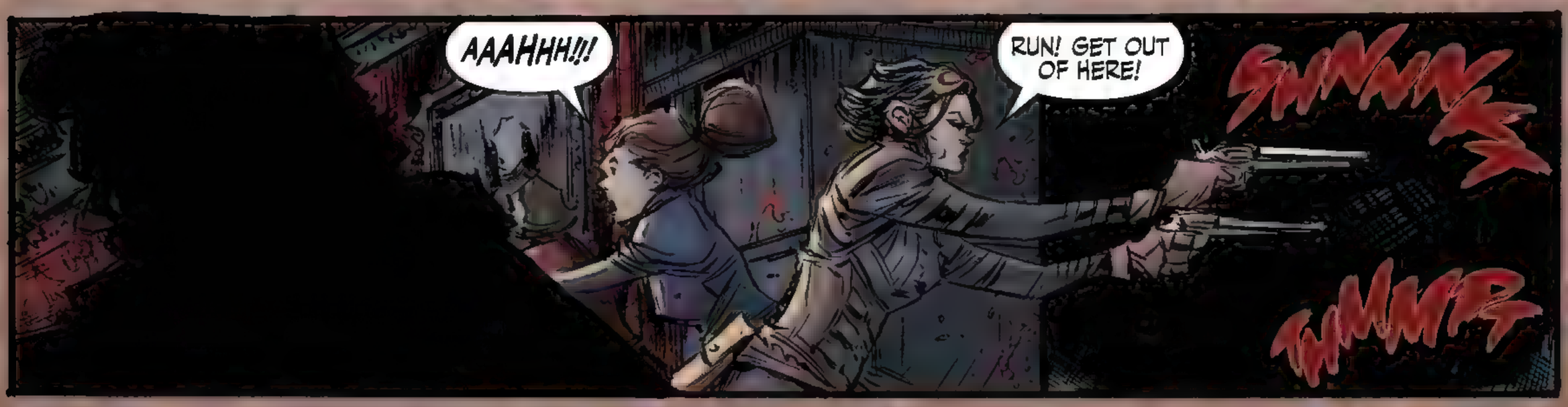
LA... LA...LA MADRINA...

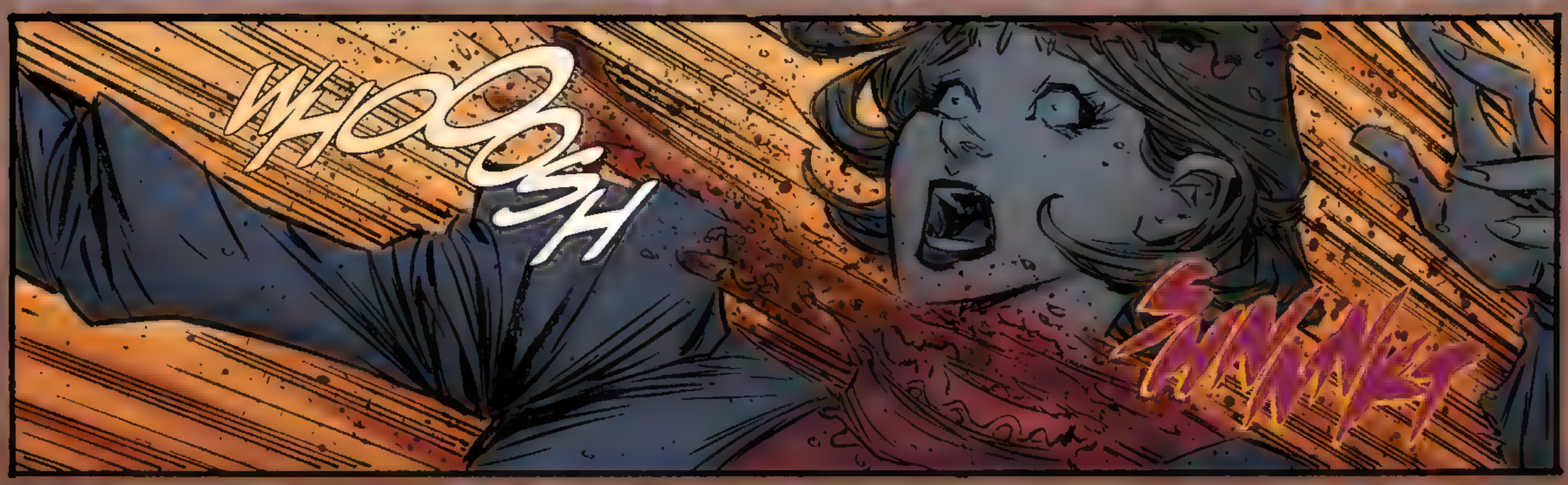
I KNOW.

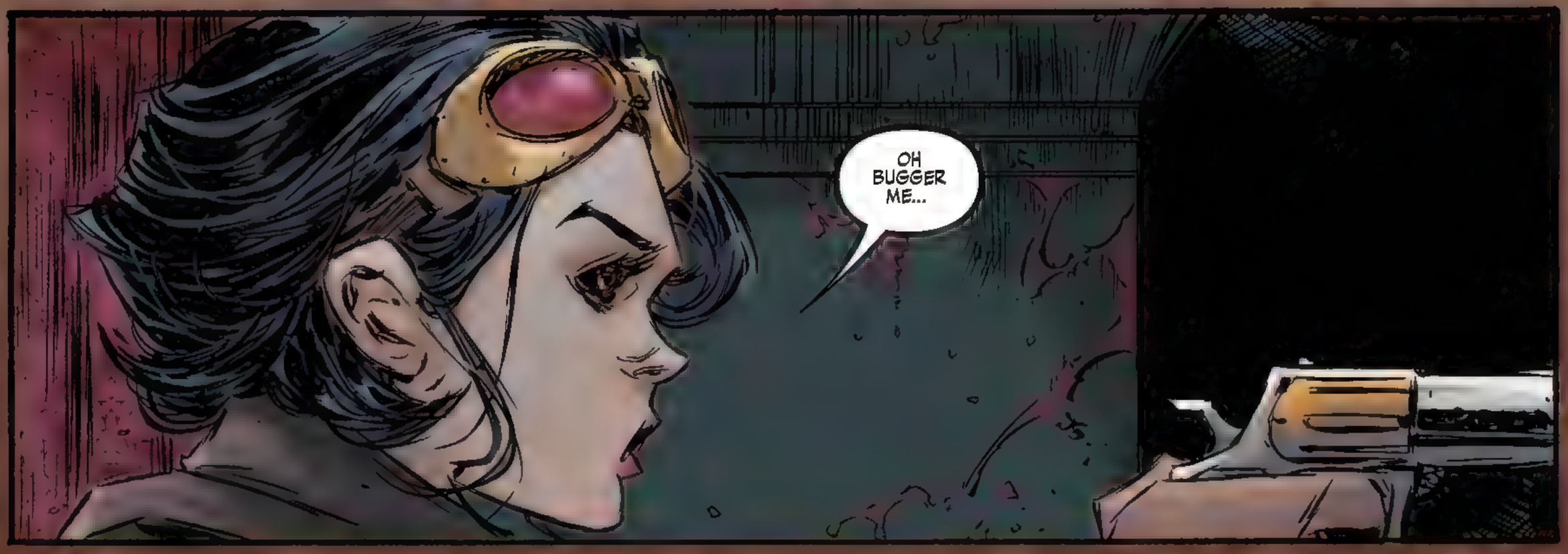
GO! GET YOURSELF TO SAFETY!


WHOOOSH
SHUNK

HUNGH... HUNGH... HUNGH...
AAAAAHHHHH!!!
THUMP
DIOS MÍO...DIOS MÍO...


AAAHHH!!!
RUN! GET OUT OF HERE!
SHUNK
THUMP


WHOOSH
SHUNK


OH BUGGER ME...

WHOOOSH

YAAHHH!!

SHUNK

WHOOSH

SHUNNK

WHOOSH

SHUNNK

HNNGHHH...

WHOOSH

WHOOSH

SHHHNK!

UGHH!

SHNNKT

STOP!

NO... NO...PLEASE... NO...

AAAHHH--

WHOOSHHNK

PLEASE DON'T HURT ME! PLEASE! I'M NOT ONE OF THEM! I SWEAR!

I'M NOT! I'M NOT!

WHOOSH

STOP!

BLAMBLAM

BLAM BLAM BLAM

AAAHHH!

WHOOSH

FLANK

GASP!

LA DAMA DE LA MUERTE?!

COVER ART BY BRIAN CHING & BETH SOTELO

Chapter Three

PROLOGUE

KLCK KLCK

TECUANI...

PAPA!

NO!

<STAY BACK, DEMON!>

<I WILL NOT ALLOW YOU TO HARM MY CHILDREN!>*

*TRANSLATED FROM SPANISH.

UNGH...

HEH HEH

YAAA

<STOP!>

‹MAKE WAY FOR LA REINA SANGRE!›
‹YOU.›

〈YOU SPEAK SPANISH.〉

〈YE...YES... I AM CALLED MALINTZE.〉

〈I SERVED AS INTERPRETER FOR THE VILLAGE.〉

〈GOOD. TELL YOUR PEOPLE THE NEW GODS HAVE ARRIVED.〉

〈WORSHIP US AND SEND US YOUR SACRIFICES, AND WE SHALL GRANT YOU OUR PATRONAGE.〉

〈DEFY US, AND YOU SHALL ALL BE DESTROYED.〉

〈DO YOU UNDERSTAND?〉

〈YES. I... I SHALL DO AS YOU COMMAND.〉

〈GOOD. YOU MAY GO.〉

〈HEAR ME! THIS ONE IS GRANTED SAFE PASSAGE. ANY WHO HARM HER SHALL ANSWER TO ME.〉

MALINTZE!

〈I SAID *YOU* HAD MY PERMISSION TO GO.〉

〈WHA... WHAT?〉

〈THANK YOU! THANK YOU, GREAT REINA!〉

YOLOTLI, NENETL! COME, WE'RE LEAVING!

‹BRING ME THE LITTLE ONES.›
NO! NO!! NOOOOO!!
MAMA!!!
MAAMAAAAA!!!
‹THE LITTLE ONES ARE ALWAYS SO SWEET.›
NO! NOOOO! MAMA!!
‹A GIFT FOR MY LOYAL RETAINERS!›
AAAHHHH!!!
‹AND THIS LITTLE GORDITO I SHALL SAVOR MYSELF...›
WAAAHHH!
WAAAAAA--

SPAIN.

FLANK

LA DAMA DE LA MUERTE!

I...I KNOW YOU...

WHY... UNGH...ARE YOU...IN SPAIN?

THWAK

THUMP

GO! GET OUT OF HERE!

RUN!

DAMA...

MADRINA...

I DON'T WANT TO FIGHT.

I HAVE KILLED FOR *LA DAMA* TOO!

WHOOSH

GHAWK

HELP ME UNDERSTAND!

WHOOSH

WHOOSH

THWK

OOOF!

THUMP

WHOOSH

FWOOSH

KWAK

YOU...

YOU HAVE EYES LIKE THE *ESCLAVOS.*

BUT YOU ARE NO *ESCLAVA.*

YOU ARE NOT MY CONCERN.

SEEK NOT TO AID LOS SANGRIENTOS...

...OR YOU TOO SHALL BE MARKED FOR LA MUERTE.

FLASH

WAIT!

MADRINA!

THUMP

SHE'S FAST. FASTER THAN ME.

AND THE PEOPLE THAT WERE FIGHTING HER...THEY WERE PRETERNATURALLY FAST TOO.

LOS SANGRIENTOS, SHE CALLED THEM. THE BLOODY ONES.

THEY...

THEY'RE GONE?

THEIR CLOTHING AND WEAPONS REMAIN BUT THEIR BODIES...

THEIR BODIES HAVE ALL *VANISHED!*

...ASHES.

NO, THEY'VE TURNED INTO...

GLASSES WERE FILLED WITH BLOOD.

COULD IT BE I'M DEALING WITH ACTUAL *VAMPIRES?*

BUT *YOU*...

YOU DIDN'T TURN TO ASH.

RED EYES, LIKE OSIRIS. AND THE BARÓN'S SON.

A HUMAN SLAVE TO THE *SANGRIENTOS?*

BUT IF YOU WERE HUMAN, WHY WERE YOU ALSO DRINKING...

...BLOOD?

WHERE... WHERE AM I?

:GASP!:

KILLER.

MURDERER...

NO...

YOU PROMISED WE'D BE SAFE...

LIAR!

WHY NIKA...

NO... I'M SORRY... I...

YOU DID THIS...

HSSSSSS

DAMA!

NOOOOO!

DAMA MECHANIKA!

I'M OKAY! I'M OKAY.

THANK THE HEAVENS!

I CAME TO BRING YOUR BREAKFAST BUT YOU WERE SPEAKING IN YOUR SLEEP.

I FEARED THE DEMON HAD RETURNED!

IT WAS ONLY A NIGHTMARE.

LIKELY PRECIPITATED BY...BY SOMETHING I ENCOUNTERED AT ALEJANDRO'S UNIVERSITY.

DOÑA ROSA, HAVE YOU EVER HEARD OF *LA DAMA DE LA MUERTE*?

THE LADY OF THE DEAD? IS THAT THE NAME OF THE DEMON THAT ATTACKED ALEJANDRO?

IT'S THE NAME OF AN ANCIENT DEITY I HEARD TALES OF IN MEXICO.

I'M NOT SURE HOW SHE RELATES TO ALEJANDRO, BUT I FOUND EVIDENCE OF HER PRESENCE AT THE UNIVERSITY.

FOLKTALES FROM THE NEW WORLD? YOU SHOULD TALK TO SEÑORA DELFINA IN THE VILLAGE, OUR LOCAL *CURANDERA*...

ding ding ding

HELLO?

SEÑORA DELFINA?

EH?

OH, HELLO THERE!

YOU'RE NOT FROM AROUND HERE. ENGLISH, YES? WHAT CAN I GET FOR YOU?

DOÑA ROSA, THE BARÓN'S HOUSEKEEPER, SENT ME --

OH? ARE THE FLUSHES BOTHERING HER AGAIN? I'LL GET HER MORE OF HER TEA...

ACTUALLY, SHE THOUGHT YOU MIGHT BE ABLE TO HELP ME. I'M --

YOU, HUH? IS THAT SO? WELL THEN, COME ALONG.

IS IT YOUR EYES? THEY'RE SENSITIVE TO THE SUNLIGHT, YES? IT SHOULD BE DARK ENOUGH IN HERE. TAKE OFF THOSE SPECTACLES AND LET ME HAVE A LOOK.

I'M NOT HERE ABOUT MY EYES. I--

GO ON THEN, HAVE A SEAT!

HUH! WELL NOW, THAT IS INTERESTING...

MOST CURIOUS...I DON'T THINK I'VE EVER SEEN ANYTHING QUITE LIKE THIS...

IT'S NOTHING, JUST A CONDITION I'VE HAD AS LONG AS I CAN REMEMBER.

BUT I'M NOT HERE ABOUT THAT. I --

NO?

YOU AREN'T ANOTHER LOOKING FOR LOVE POTIONS, ARE YOU? I DON'T SELL LOVE POTIONS.

IF THAT'S WHAT YOU'RE LOOKING FOR, YOU CAN GO TO THAT OLD *BRUJA* AT THE PLAZA.

I WOULDN'T RECOMMEND IT, THOUGH.

DANGEROUS THINGS, LOVE POTIONS.

NO, NOTHING LIKE THAT. DOÑA ROSA SAID--

HERE, DRINK THIS.

WHAT IS IT?

TEA, OF COURSE. YOU DON'T HAVE TEA IN YOUR COUNTRY? MY PRIVATE BLEND FOR SOOTHING THE NERVES, WITH A PINCH OF VALERIAN TO HELP YOU WITH YOUR SLEEP.

YOU ARE HAVING TROUBLE SLEEPING, YES? NIGHTMARES?

DREAMS ARE MESSAGES FROM YOUR MIND. IT'S TRYING TO TELL YOU SOMETHING YOU'VE FORGOTTEN.

I HAVE AN ELIXIR FOR ENCOURAGING WAKING DREAMS, IF YOU'D LIKE TO EXPLORE WHAT SECRETS YOUR MIND WISHES FOR YOU TO KNOW.

OR I HAVE A TINCTURE THAT PROMOTES DREAMLESS SLEEP, IF YOU WOULD PREFER TO FORGET. THOUGH IT'S UNWISE TO IGNORE YOUR INNER SELF FOR TOO LONG.

I...HOW DID YOU KNOW?

IT'S MY JOB TO KNOW, CARIÑA. HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN HAVING THEM?

A FEW MONTHS. THEY SEEM TO BE COMING MORE FREQUENTLY.

WAKING DREAMS? IS IT SAFE? COULD IT... COULD IT HELP TO UNLOCK MEMORIES WHICH I'VE FORGOTTEN?

OF COURSE IT'S SAFE, I'M A HEALER! AND YES, IF THOSE LOST MEMORIES ARE THE THINGS YOUR MIND WISHES FOR YOU TO REMEMBER.

I THINK I SHOULD LIKE TO PURCHASE THIS ELIXIR, THANK YOU, THOUGH I'LL HAVE TO WAIT UNTIL A LATER DATE TO TRY THIS WAKING DREAMING.

FOR NOW I MUST FOCUS ON A MORE URGENT MATTER.

DOÑA ROSA SAID YOU MIGHT BE FAMILIAR WITH MEXICAN FOLKLORE.

MEXICAN LORE, IS IT? *SÍ*, MY MOTHER WAS BORN IN MEXICO. I LEARNED MUCH OF MY ART FROM HER.

IN THE BEGINNING, AT LEAST. I'VE SINCE ADDED THE TEACHINGS OF SEVERAL OTHER CULTURES, JEWISH, EGYPTIAN, ARABIC...

I HAVE AN ARAB GRANDFATHER, YOU KNOW, AND A JEWISH GREAT-GRANDMOTHER, AND AN AUNT WHO WAS ROMANI, A GYPSY.

ANCIENT CULTURES KNEW SO MUCH MORE ABOUT WOMEN'S HEALTH THAN TODAY'S SO-CALLED DOCTORS.

SEÑORA, AMONG ALL THIS LORE THAT YOU'VE STUDIED, HAVE YOU EVER COME ACROSS CREATURES WHO DRINK HUMAN BLOOD?

BLOOD DRINKERS? LIKE VAMPIRES?

MY *MAMÁ* TOLD ME TALES OF THE *TLAHUELPUCHI*, BLOOD DRINKERS WHO COULD CHANGE SHAPE AND ENTERED INTO SECRET PACTS WITH *BRUJOS* WHO PRACTICED BLACK MAGIC.

AND THE *STRIGOI* OF ROMANIA WERE THE SCOURGE OF EUROPE UNTIL VAMPIRE HUNTERS CAME AND EXTERMINATED THEM WITH ASH WOOD STAKES.

BUT THAT WAS HUNDREDS OF YEARS AGO, AND THERE HAVE BEEN NO SIGHTINGS SINCE.

YOU THINK YOU HAVE CROSSED PATHS WITH A VAMPIRE? VERY, VERY DANGEROUS. I SHALL MAKE YOU A CHARM OF PROTECTION.

I AM NOT CERTAIN. I ENCOUNTERED SOMEONE CALLING HERSELF *LA MADRINA*.

LA MADRINA?

I HAVEN'T HEARD THAT NAME IN AGES. MY *MAMÁ* WOULD TRY TO SCARE ME WHEN I WAS NAUGHTY -- OBEY YOUR *MAMÁ* OR *LA MADRINA* WILL TAKE YOU!

BUT *LA MADRINA* IS NO VAMPIRE. SHE IS THE GODMOTHER, THE DARK MADONNA. PARENTS USE HER TO FRIGHTEN CHILDREN INTO BEHAVING, AND BEREAVED MOTHERS PRAY TO HER FOR THEIR LOST CHILDREN.

TO WATCH OVER THEM IN THE AFTERLIFE?

NO. TO AVENGE THEIR DEATHS.

LA MADRINA WAS A MOTHER, THE STORIES SAY, WHOSE CHILDREN WERE WRONGFULLY MURDERED.

SO SHE SOLD HER SOUL TO BECOME DEATH'S HANDMAIDEN, A LIVING INCARNATION OF *LA DAMA DE LA MUERTE*, THE GODDESS OF THE UNDERWORLD IN MEXICA LEGENDS.

TO AVENGE THE DEATHS OF HER CHILDREN, AND OF LOST CHILDREN EVERYWHERE.

I AM...I AM FAMILIAR WITH *LA DAMA DE LA MUERTE*.

MANY YEARS AGO WHEN I WAS IN MEXICO, A *CURANDERO* SAVED ME FROM DEATH, BUT HE CLAIMED IT WAS THE LADY WHO BROUGHT ME BACK.

AFTER I WAS HEALED...I DO NOT KNOW IF IT WAS JUST MY OWN ANGER, OR IF I WAS TRULY UNDER THE LADY'S INFLUENCE. I WAS FILLED WITH AN UNCONTROLLABLE RAGE...

...A NEED TO AVENGE THE FRIENDS WHOSE DEATHS I HAD CAUSED.*

*SEE *LADY MECHANIKA: LA DAMA DE LA MUERTE*.

A PRICE MUST ALWAYS BE PAID WHEN DEALING WITH THE GODS AND SPIRITS OF THE OTHERWORLD.

IF THIS *CURANDERO* DID INDEED REQUIRE PRAYERS TO *LA DAMA DE LA MUERTE* TO HEAL YOU FROM YOUR INJURIES, THE LADY MAY VERY WELL HAVE EXACTED YOUR SERVICE AS PAYMENT.

AND IF YOU TRULY WERE IN SERVICE TO *LA DAMA*, THEN IT IS ***YOU*** WHO WOULD HAVE THE GREATER UNDERSTANDING OF *LA MADRINA*.

A FEW MINUTES LATER...

KLK KLK KLK

DAMA MECHANIKA.

YES?

MY MASTER WISHES A WORD WITH YOU.

YOUR MASTER?

AND WHO MIGHT THAT BE?

MY *PATRONA.*

IS YOUR *PATRONA* A *SANGRIENTA?*

THAT IS NOT A TERM WE USE.

IF YOU PLEASE. MY MASTER AWAITS.

I...I DO NOT THINK THAT WOULD BE WISE...

WE PROMISE NO HARM SHALL COME TO YOU. MY MASTER ONLY WISHES TO CONVERSE.

IF SHE WISHED YOU ILL, YOU WOULD ALREADY BE DEAD.

PLEASE, HAVE A SEAT.

WHOOSH

DAMA MECHANIKA...

I AM CALLED...

...LA REINA ROJA...

cover art by Brian Ching & Beth Sotelo

Chapter Four

PROLOGUE

I SWEAR TO YOU, TECUANI.

SHIFF SHIFF

NENETL, YOLOTLI.

MY DARLING BABIES.

SHEFF

HUNGH!

I SWEAR TO YOU ALL, MY BROTHERS AND SISTERS!

I WILL NOT REST UNTIL YOUR DEATHS ARE AVENGED!

SOMEHOW... I SWEAR IT...I SWEAR IT...

THERE IS A WAY.

WHO... WHO ARE YOU?

YOU MAY CALL ME...GREAT-MOTHER.

YOU ARE A DARK ONE! A SORCERER OF MICTLAN!

I SERVE THE LADY.

YOU'VE COME TOO LATE. THEY'RE ALL DEAD.

I COME WHEN I AM CALLED.

THE LADY HAS HEARD YOUR PRAYERS, AND THE PRAYERS OF THE DEAD.

THEY CRY OUT FOR VENGEANCE. WILL YOU GIVE IT TO THEM?

HOW?

THERE IS A WAY. BUT THE WAY IS DARK. DARK AND COSTLY.

I WOULD PAY ANY PRICE. MY ***LIFE,*** IF NEEDED.

IT WILL COST MORE THAN YOUR LIFE.

DO YOU HAVE THE COURAGE, THE ***HEART,*** TO SACRIFICE YOUR IMMORTAL SOUL?

YES.

THEN COME WITH ME.

DAYS LATER...

WHERE ARE YOU TAKING ME, BLESSED MOTHER?

YOURS IS NOT THE ONLY SACRIFICE REQUIRED FOR SUCH TERRIBLE MAGICKS.

IT WILL REQUIRE ALL THE DARK ONES.

THE DARK ONES ARE HERE? IN THE MIDDLE OF THE JUNGLE?

THEY ARE HERE.

WHAT IS THIS PLACE?

THE GREAT TEMPLE OF MICTLĀNTĒCUTLI, LORD OF THE UNDERWORLD.

I THOUGHT YOU SERVED THE LADY?

YES, MICTĒCACIHUĀTL, HIS CONSORT. QUEEN OF MICTLAN, LADY OF THE DEAD.

THE LADY'S DOMAIN LIES...

...BELOW...

SPAIN.

DAMA MECHANIKA.

I AM CALLED *LA REINA ROJA.*

YOU ARE A ***VAMPIRE.***

THERE ARE SOME WHO REFER TO US AS SUCH. WE HAVE HAD MANY NAMES THROUGHOUT THE CENTURIES.

YOU FEED OFF HUMANS, DRINK THEIR BLOOD.

YESSSS...

WE ARE THE ***FIRST ONES.***

WE HAVE WALKED THIS EARTH FOR MILLENNIA, SINCE YOUR KIND WERE BUT BEASTS HUDDLING IN CAVES.

BUT WE CULTIVATED YOU, NURTURED YOU, ENCOURAGED YOU TO EVOLVE INTO...

...THISSSS...

PERHAPS WE MADE A MISTAKE.

WHAT DO YOU WANT?

YOU WERE HIRED TO PROTECT THE BOY, ALEJANDRO.

I WAS HIRED TO KILL YOU.

WERE YOU?

TO FIND AND KILL THE CREATURE WHO'S BEEN PREYING ON ALEJANDRO.

WE HAVE NOT HARMED HIM. THE BOY IS UNDER OUR PROTECTION.

IT WOULD BE BEST IF YOU RETURNED HIM TO US.

RETURNED? HE IS AT HIS HOME, UNDER THE CARE OF HIS PARENTS.

HE IS ONE OF OURS NOW. THE HUMANS ARE CONFINING HIM AGAINST HIS WISHES.

YOU ARE FEEDING OFF HIM.

HE IS A *VASALLO,* A SERVANT.

I WILL NOT ALLOW YOU TO TAKE HIM.

YOU WILL NOT ALLOW? YOU CANNOT STOP US. THE BOY IS COMING WITH US, ONE WAY OR ANOTHER.

YOU WOULD BE WISE TO ASSIST US. YOU COULD PREVENT MUCH UNNECESSARY BLOODSHED.

NO. I WON'T LET YOU ENSLAVE HIM.

HE IS NO SLAVE. IT IS A GREAT HONOR TO SERVE AS A *VASALLO*. HE ENTERED THE PACT GRATEFULLY, AS DO ALL WHO ARE GIVEN THE OPPORTUNITY.

THEY GIVE US THEIR BLOOD, BUT WE SHARE ***OUR*** BLOOD WITH THEM IN RETURN, AND IT GIFTS THEM WITH GREAT STRENGTH AND EVEN LONG LIFE.

IF YOU HAD THE CHANCE TO BECOME A GOD AMONG YOUR PEOPLE IN EXCHANGE FOR A TRIVIAL DONATION OF YOUR BLOOD, WOULD YOU NOT TAKE IT?

NO.

THEY SAID YOU WERE NOT UNREASONABLE. I SEE NOW THAT THEY WERE MISTAKEN.

"THEY"? WHO ARE THEY?

CERTAIN OF MY KIND WHO HAVE HAD DEALINGS WITH YOU, IN THE PAST.

I HAVE NEVER MET ANY OF YOUR KIND BEFORE.

HAVEN'T YOU?

YOU CAN CHANGE YOUR FORM, APPEAR HUMAN.

IF WE SO CHOOSE.

WHY DID YOU SHOW YOUR TRUE SELF TO ME?

I AM *LA REINA ROJA*, FIRST OF MY BLOODLINE! I DO NOT CHANGE MY FORM TO APPEASE THE SENSIBILITIES OF LESSER LIFE FORMS.

WHY IS ONE SUCH ***LESSER*** LIFE FORM OF SUCH IMPORTANCE TO YOU? IF WHAT YOU SAY IS TRUE, YOU SURELY HAVE MANY *VASALLOS* OTHER THAN ALEJANDRO WHO WOULD SERVE READILY.

I AGREE. MY SON LUCIAN DOES NOT.

HE HAS BECOME INFATUATED WITH THE BOY. IT HAPPENS OFTEN THESE DAYS WITH THE YOUNGER GENERATIONS, THEY BECOME TOO ATTACHED TO THEIR PETS, TOO FAMILIAR WITH THE HUMANS.

AND THEIR RECKLESSNESS HAS DRAWN UNWANTED ATTENTION.

LA MADRINA.

HSSSS... DO NOT SPEAK THAT NAME! SHE IS AN ABOMINATION. A BUTCHER!

YOU KILLED HER FAMILY.

NOT I. NOT ANY OF MY BLOODLINE.

IS OUR ENTIRE RACE TO BE BLAMED FOR THE SINS OF A FEW?

CENTURIES AGO HUMANS WAGED A DEVASTATING WAR AGAINST MY KIND. ***LA MATANZA,*** WE CALL IT, THE SLAUGHTER. MANY OF US PERISHED, AS DID MANY OF YOU.

WE ENACTED LAWS TO PREVENT SUCH A CALAMITY FROM EVER HAPPENING AGAIN. MOST OF US AGREED TO IT. SOME FEW DID NOT.

THE RENEGADES FLED TO THE NEW WORLD, LED BY THE ONE THEY CALLED ***LA REINA SANGRE,*** THE BLOOD QUEEN, FOR FREEDOM FROM THE REPRESSIVE LAWS OF THE TRIBUNAL, THEY CLAIMED.

IN TRUTH, THEY ONLY WANTED A PLACE WHERE THEY COULD REVEL IN THEIR THIRST FOR BLOOD AND VIOLENCE.

YOUR LAWS FORBID THE KILLING OF HUMANS?

NOT EXACTLY.

OUR LAWS FORBID ***REVEALING*** OURSELVES TO HUMANS, OPENLY. WE LIVE IN SECRET NOW, BUT PEACEFULLY AMONGST YOU.

LA REINA SANGRE AND HER FOLLOWERS ABJURED THESE LAWS AND DEMANDED WORSHIP AND OBEDIENCE FROM THE INHABITANTS OF THE NEW WORLD, SLAUGHTERING ALL WHO REFUSED.

THEY SUCCEEDED ONLY IN UNLEASHING AN EVEN GREATER TERROR UPON US THAN WE HAD EVER ENCOUNTERED BEFORE.

LA MADRINA.

SHE HUNTED AND EXECUTED THE ONES RESPONSIBLE FOR MURDERING HER FAMILY, BUT IT WAS NOT ENOUGH TO SATIATE HER NEED FOR VENGEANCE.

SHE WILL NOT BE SATISFIED UNTIL EVERY LAST ONE OF OUR RACE IS DEAD.

IT WOULD BE UNWISE FOR US TO ENGAGE *LA MADRINA*, SO WE ARE DEPARTING. WE LEAVE TONIGHT. BUT MY SON WILL NOT LEAVE WITHOUT THE BOY ALEJANDRO.

IF YOU WILL NOT ASSIST US, LUCIAN WILL TAKE HIM BY FORCE.

I CANNOT STAND BY AND ALLOW YOU TO STEAL ALEJANDRO AGAINST THE WISHES OF HIS PARENTS.

IS IT RIGHT THAT THEIR WISHES SHOULD SUPERSEDE THE BOY'S OWN DESIRES? ASK HIM YOURSELF. LET HIM CHOOSE HIS OWN PATH.

I CANNOT. ALEJANDRO WAS INJURED.

HE HAS NOT AWOKEN SINCE.

INJURED? AND THESE ARE THE ONES TO WHOM YOU WOULD ENTRUST HIS CARE?

HE IS TREATED WITH GREATER REGARD AND RESPECT AMONG US, A PRECIOUS TREASURE THAT MUST BE CHERISHED.

HERE. GIVE HIM THIS.

BLOOD?

MY BLOOD. THE STRENGTH OF A FIRST ONE RESIDES WITHIN. GIVE IT TO THE BOY. IT WILL HEAL WHATEVER AILS HIM.

THEN, IF HE CONFIRMS HIS WISHES, WILL YOU BRING HIM TO US?

I...I WILL CONSIDER IT.

CONSIDER THIS. *LA MADRINA* MAKES NO DISTINCTION BETWEEN US AND THOSE THAT SERVE US.

IF SHE FINDS THE BOY-- AND SHE ***WILL*** FIND HIM, ONCE WE HAVE GONE -- SHE WILL NOT HESITATE TO KILL HIM.

"ALL..."

"ALL FOR IMMORTALITY..."

"LOVE LIKE THE LIGHT SILENTLY WRAPPING--"

KLK KLK

WHAT WAS THAT?

I'M BEING SILLY. IT'S NOTHING.

IT'S ALWAYS NOTH--

:GASP!:

WHO... WHO ARE YOU? WHAT DO YOU WANT?

I'VE COME FOR --

ALEJANDRO!

UNBREAK!
UNGH...
LEAVE MY SON ALONE!
YOUR SON!
THIS IS HOW YOU TREAT YOUR SON?! YOUR OWN BLOOD?!
:GASP:
YOU... YOU'RE THE DEMON!

CHNKT

CHNKT

CHNKT

ALEJANDRO...

ALEJANDRO, IT'S ME, LUCIAN.

WHAT DID YOU DO TO HIM?! WHY WON'T HE WAKE UP?

I WON'T LET YOU...

...HURT HIM?

IT'S OKAY, MI CORAZÓN. I'M HERE NOW.

SPLSSH

GWOAH

PWFFFT

GET AWAY FROM MY SON!

YOU DON'T DESERVE HIM!

ALEJANDRO IS A KIND AND GENTLE SOUL, AND YOU DID *THIS* TO HIM!

MONSTER!

DIE, DEMON!

BWOOM

AGGGCK!

YOU'RE THE MONSTER!

WHOOSH

LUCIAN! NO!

ALEJANDRO WON'T THANK YOU FOR KILLING HIS FATHER, HOWEVER HORRIBLE HE MAY BE.

UNGH!

NO. HE'S NOT--

SNIFF SNIFF

BEHIND YOU!

WHOOSH

LA MADRINA!!!

SLASH

NOOOO!

CLANK

GET ALEJANDRO TO SAFETY! GET HIM OUT OF HERE!

CLANK

I CAN HANDLE *HER!*

KOFF KOFF

PLEASE! DON'T TAKE MY SON!

NO...

STOP!

UNGH...

HUNGH!

THUMPT

THUD

ALEJANDRO!

SLASH

SNK!

SNNK!

SHANK!

SHUNK!

THMPT

THMPT

PTHWMPT

LOOKS LIKE THE TALES OF *LA MADRINA*'S INVINCIBILITY WERE ALL EXAGGERATIONS.

ALEJANDRO...

YOU'RE OKAY...YOU'LL BE OKAY...

HERE... *DRINK...*

FSSS

FSSSS

LA MADRINA!

STOP!

SHUNK

SHUNK

AGCK..
AGCK...

ALL SANGRIENTOS MUST DIE!

NO! THE BOY IS HUMAN! INNOCENT!

WOULD YOU SLAY HIM IN FRONT OF HIS PARENTS, AS YOUR CHILDREN WERE SLAIN IN FRONT OF YOU?

UNGH...

THWMP

LUCIAN! WE NEED TO GO!

NO... ALEJANDRO...WE CAN'T...LEAVE HIM...

I'M SORRY, LUCIAN.

ALL SANGRIENTOS MUST DIE...

WOOSH

NO...

NO!!!

ALEJANDRO, WAKE UP! PLEASE, PLEASE WAKE UP!

LEONORA, HE ISN'T BREATHING...

NO...NO...

LET ME TRY...

WHAT IS THAT? WHAT ARE YOU GIVING HIM?

A...A TONIC. IT SHOULD REVIVE HIM.

:GASP!:

ALEJANDRO! OH THANK YOU, LADY MECHANIKA, THANK YOU!

MAMÁ? WHAT...WHAT HAPPENED?

YOU JUST TOOK ILL FOR A BIT, DARLING. BUT YOU'RE ALL RIGHT NOW, EVERYTHING'S ALL RIGHT.

WHO... WHO ARE YOU?

YOUR EYES...DID LUCIAN SEND YOU?

I AM NO *VASALLO.*

THIS IS LADY MECHANIKA. I ASKED HER TO COME HERE TO HELP YOU.

LEONORA... LOOK AT HIS EYES...

THE DEMON INFECTED HIM AGAIN!

FETCH PADRE DOMINGUEZ! HIS EXORCISM WORKED BEFORE, IT WILL WORK AGAIN!

EXORCISM? DEMON? WHAT ARE YOU...

YOU DID THIS TO ME! YOU AND THAT FALSE PRIEST! I WAS NEVER SICK!

THAT...THAT'S BLOOD!

WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?

IT'S NOTHING TO WORRY ABOUT, DARLING. WE JUST HAD A FEW...TRESPASSERS, THAT'S ALL.

THEY FOUGHT AMONGST THEMSELVES BUT LADY MECHANIKA STOPPED THEM, CHASED THEM ALL AWAY.

THAT'S NOT EXACTLY...

IT WAS THE ***DEMON!*** HE STOOD OVER YOU WITH HIS CLAWS, INFECTED YOU WITH HIS TAINTED BLOOD.

I TRIED TO STOP HIM, SHOT HIM REPEATEDLY, BUT IT HAD NO EFFECT!

LUCIAN... ***YOU SHOT LUCIAN!***

I NEED TO GO FIND HIM!

YOU'RE NOT GOING ANYWHERE!

DID YOU NOT HEAR ME? YOU WERE INFECTED BY A DEMON! YOU NEED TO BE TREATED!

THERE'S NOTHING WRONG WITH ME! I'M NOT INFECTED!

AND LUCIAN ISN'T A DEMON!

ALEJANDRO, THIS CREATURE YOU'VE BEFRIENDED, HE ISN'T HUMAN.

JUST BECAUSE HE'S DIFFERENT DOESN'T MAKE HIM EVIL!

HE'S USING YOU. YOU'RE JUST FOOD TO HIM.
THAT'S NOT TRUE! HE LOVES ME!
AND I LOVE HIM!
BAH! I REFUSE TO LISTEN TO ANY MORE OF THE DEMON'S FILTH!
IT'S TRUE, I LOVE HIM!
I WILL NOT ALLOW THIS DEMON TO TURN MY SON INTO A DEVIANT!
HE DIDN'T TURN ME INTO THIS! I'VE ALWAYS BEEN THIS WAY!
ALL MY LIFE I'VE BEEN DIFFERENT!
ALL MY LIFE I'VE STRUGGLED TO BE NORMAL, TO BE MORE LIKE *YOU!* BUT IT JUST WASN'T ME!
MAYBE IT'S WRONG, MAYBE IT'S A SIN, BUT I CAN'T BE ANYTHING ELSE!
PADRE DOMINGUEZ WILL FIX YOU.
IT ISN'T SOMETHING THAT CAN BE FIXED! IF I COULD FIX IT, I WOULD! DO YOU THINK I WANT TO BE THIS WAY?
YOU HAVE NO IDEA WHAT IT'S BEEN LIKE! HAVING TO PRETEND EVERY DAY, NEVER FEELING LIKE I BELONG. ALWAYS TERRIFIED THAT SOMEONE WOULD FIND OUT, THAT *YOU* WOULD FIND OUT!
I'VE FELT ASHAMED AND ALONE EVERY MISERABLE DAY OF MY LIFE! ALONE, UNTIL I MET LUCIAN.
LUCIAN SHOWED ME I DON'T HAVE TO HATE MYSELF, THAT IT'S OKAY TO BE THE WAY I AM!
OKAY? IT IS NOT OKAY!
YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND WHAT THESE DEVIANTS ARE LIKE! PREYING ON INNOCENT YOUNG BOYS AND FORCING THEIR FILTH ON THEM!
PREYING ON YOUNG BOYS...WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?!
NO ONE'S *FORCING* ANYONE! I'M A GROWN MAN! LET ME MAKE MY OWN CHOICES!
IF IT'S A SIN, SO BE IT! GOD'S THE ONE WHO MADE ME THIS WAY, MADE ME SUFFER FOR YEARS!
IF I'VE FOUND SOMEONE WHO LOVES ME THE WAY I AM, IF I'VE FINALLY FOUND A PLACE WHERE I FEEL SAFE AND ACCEPTED, WHAT'S THE HARM IN THAT?
WHAT'S THE HARM? WHAT'S THE HARM?!
YOU'D BE BETTER OFF DEAD THAN--
PEDRO, PLEASE!
ALEJANDRO ISN'T HIMSELF. HE NEEDS OUR HELP, NOT OUR CENSURE.
IF HE DOESN'T TRUST PADRE DOMINGUEZ, PERHAPS WE COULD TRY SPEAKING WITH PADRE AMADEO.
WOULD THAT BE BETTER, ALEJANDRO?
ALEJANDRO?

ALEJANDRO!

HE'S RUN BACK TO THEM, BACK TO THE DEMON!

LUCIAN ISN'T THE ONE YOU NEED TO WORRY ABOUT.

LA MADRINA IS COMING FOR THEM ALL.

IF SHE CROSSES PATHS WITH YOUR SON...

SHE WILL KILL HIM.

COVER ART BY BRIAN CHING & BETH SOTELO

Chapter Five

PROLOGUE

LAST CHANCE TO TURN BACK.

I'M NOT TURNING BACK.

THINK CAREFULLY, CHILD.

YOU WILL BELONG TO THE LADY HEART AND SOUL, SERVING AS DEATH'S HAND-MAIDEN FROM NOW UNTIL THE END OF DAYS.

YOU WILL NOT JOIN YOUR HUSBAND AND CHILDREN IN THE LANDS BEYOND.

BUT I...I'LL HAVE THE POWER TO AVENGE THEM? THEIR SOULS WILL REST IN PEACE?

THEY WILL TAKE THEIR HONORED PLACES IN THE KINGDOM OF THE SUN.

THEN I AM CONTENT. I GIVE MYSELF WHOLLY, HEART AND SOUL, TO THE LADY.

SO BE IT...

MICTĒCACIHUĀTL.

QUEEN OF THE UNDERWORLD.

LADY OF THE DEAD.

WE GIFT UNTO YOU OUR LIVES.

WE GIFT UNTO YOU OUR DEATHS.

GRANT THIS DAUGHTER YOUR WISDOM.

GRANT THIS DAUGHTER YOUR POWER.

RAISE HER AS YOUR VESSEL.

THUMP

THUMP

RAISE HER AS YOUR HANDMAIDEN.

THUMP

THUMP

FSSSS

FSSSS

FSSS

AS THE GODS SACRIFICED THEMSELVES TO GIVE LIFE TO MANKIND, SO DO WE SACRIFICE OURSELVES TO GIVE LIFE UNTO YOUR CHOSEN.

SACRED LADY OF THE DEAD!

DO YOU ACCEPT THIS HUMBLE OFFERING?

FSSS

FSSS

FSSS

FSSS

FSSS

FSSS

SNAP

SPAIN.

FSSSs

FSSSs

FSSSs

SSS

FSSSs

FSSSs

EL ESCLAVO...

WHOOOSH

COVER ART BY BRIAN CHING & BETH SOTELO

MEANWHILE...

WHAT DO YOU HAVE THERE?

EVERYTHING WE NEED TO FIGHT THE *DEMONIOS*. HOLY WATER, GREEK FIRE, SILVER BULLETS.

THAT'S ALL VERY WELL AND GOOD, BUT PERHAPS WE COULD TRY A LITTLE DIPLOMACY FIRST.

DIPLOMACY! DEMONS AND *DEVIL WORSHIPPERS* HAVE MY *SON* IN *THRALL!*

ALEJANDRO'S FRIENDS AREN'T THE ENEMY, DON PEDRO. I'M CERTAIN IF WE DISCUSS THE SITUATION CALMLY WE CAN GET HIM BACK WITHOUT ANY BLOODSHED.

GAH! THIS IS WHAT COMES OF HIRING A WOMAN TO DO MEN'S WORK! WILL YOU EVEN BE ABLE TO TRACK HIM?

I CAN TRACK HIM.

I THINK I KNOW WHERE HE'S GOING. ARE YOU FAMILIAR WITH THIS AREA?

THERE'S NOTHING OUT THERE BUT THE RUINS OF AN OLD WATCHTOWER. WHY WOULD ALEJANDRO GO THERE?

IT'S THEIR SECRET MEETING PLACE.

MEETING PLACE? HOW DID YOU GET A HOLD OF THIS? YOU *ARE* IN LEAGUE WITH THEM!

DON'T BE ABSURD. THIS IS WHAT I WAS HIRED TO DO.

NOW, ARE YOU COMING?

DON PEDRO, YOU'VE BECOME ENTANGLED WITH FORCES BEYOND YOUR UNDERSTANDING, BUT I HAVE WALKED THESE ROADS BEFORE.

THESE PEOPLE, ALEJANDRO'S FRIENDS, THEY ARE DIFFERENT, YES, BUT THEY AREN'T DEMONIC. THEY AREN'T EVIL.

IF YOU FORCE YOUR SON TO LEAVE THEM, EVEN WITH HIS BEST INTERESTS IN MIND, HE WON'T THANK YOU FOR IT. YOU MAY END UP LOSING HIM FOREVER.

BAH, WHAT WOULD YOU KNOW ABOUT IT.

MORE THAN YOU KNOW, DON PEDRO.

MORE THAN YOU KNOW...

SHORTLY...

LUCIAN!

LUCIAN?

ALEJANDRO? YOU'RE OKAY!

I THOUGHT YOU WERE...THEY WOULDN'T LET ME GO BACK FOR YOU!

IT'S OKAY, I'M OKAY NOW. BUT YOU! YOU'RE HURT! MY FATHER...

NO, YOUR FATHER COULDN'T HURT ME, THOUGH HE TRIED. IT WAS *LA MADRINA*. SHE NEARLY TOOK MY HEAD.

THE WOUND IS HEALING, BUT SLOWLY.

LA MADRINA? WHO'S *LA MADRINA*?

AH, YOUNG ALEJANDRO. YOU LOOK WELL. MY BLOOD SEEMS TO AGREE WITH YOU.

DID LA DAMA MECHANIKA BRING YOU BACK TO US?

WHAT? NO, I CAME ALONE...

YOU CAME DIRECTLY FROM YOUR FATHER'S *PAZO?*

YES, I TOOK MY HORSE...

MI REINA, HE MAY HAVE BEEN FOLLOWED. WE SHOULD LEAVE IMMEDIATELY.

FOLLOWED? NO ONE FOLLOWED ME. WHAT'S GOING ON?

WE ARE LEAVING SPAIN. IT IS NO LONGER SAFE FOR US HERE.

YOU HAVE A PLACE AMONG US, IF YOU WISH IT.

I...I'LL GO WHEREVER LUCIAN GOES.

CONSIDER IT CAREFULLY. WE WILL NOT BE RETURNING. IF YOU COME WITH US, YOU MAY NEVER SEE YOUR FAMILY AGAIN.

I DON'T WANT TO GO BACK. THERE'S NOTHING FOR ME AT HOME.

VERY WELL. YOU MAY RIDE WITH US. MY CARRIAGE IS WAITING.

BUT *MI REINA,* WE HAVEN'T FINISHED LOADING EVERYTHING.

LEAVE THE REST. WE MUST DEPART NOW, BEFORE --

LA MADRINA!

GO! PROTECT *LA REINA!*

SHUNK

BA-THMP BA-THMP

BA-THMP

THERE! THAT'S ALEJANDRO'S HORSE!

THEY MUST BE IN THE RUINS.

REMEMBER, WE ARE MORE LIKELY TO RETRIEVE ALEJANDRO UNHARMED IF WE DON'T GO IN LOOKING FOR A FIGHT.

HOW CAN YOU BE SO CERTAIN THAT THESE CREATURES AREN'T EVIL?

HOW CAN YOU BE SO CERTAIN THAT THEY ARE?

LIKE OURSELVES, I DON'T BELIEVE THEY ARE INHERENTLY GOOD OR EVIL. BUT I DO BELIEVE THEY INTEND NO HARM TO ALEJANDRO.

ONE OF THEM GAVE ME THE TONIC THAT SAVED HIS LIFE.

THERE'S NOTHING AND NO ONE HERE. THEY MUST HAVE TAKEN HIM SOMEWHERE ELSE.

NO, LOOK...

BUT THE TRACKS LEAD INTO THE WALL!

NO. THEY LEAD...

SHHFFF

...HERE.

HOW WERE YOU ABLE TO MOVE THAT STONE?

SURELY THE BARONESA TOLD YOU ABOUT MY SPECIAL ABILITIES?

SHE SAID YOUR PROSTHETICS MADE YOU UNCOMMONLY STRONG, BUT THAT STONE MUST HAVE WEIGHED A TONNE!

NO ORDINARY HUMAN COULD MOVE IT. CERTAINLY NOT ALEJANDRO...

ALEJANDRO HAS GAINED UNUSUAL STRENGTH AS WELL, FROM HIS AFFILIATION WITH THE...CREATURES.

HMPH. WELL, AT LEAST SOMETHING GOOD HAS COME OF IT. HE WAS ALWAYS WEAK AND SICKLY AS A CHILD.

HE INHERITED HIS MOTHER'S CONSTITUTION.

OH NO...

LA MADRINA IS ALREADY HERE.

SOMEONE'S COMING THIS WAY!

HURRY!

AAAAHHHHH!!!

DEMONIOS!

BWOOM

NO! STOP!

WHAT ARE YOU DOING, WOMAN!

THESE ARE ALEJANDRO'S FRIENDS!

LOOK AT THEM!

HSSSS

KSSSS

HHHHSSSS

WAIT! WE--

SLASH

UNGH!

WE'RE NOT HERE...

...TO FIGHT YOU!

CHK CHK

DON PEDRO! WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

SAVING YOU!

KRACK

I TOLD YOU THEY'RE NOT--

AAAAHHHH!

SHLASS

SNIFF SNIFF

WAIT!

PTKHU

WHAT *ARE* YOU?

YOU TASTE...LIKE US, BUT NOT.

I...I TASTE LIKE YOU?

YOUR BLOOD.

I DON'T KNOW. I'M NOT ONE OF YOU, AND I'M NO *VASALLO*, BUT I MEAN YOU NO HARM.

WHERE IS *LA REINA ROJA*? THIS ONE IS LOOKING FOR HIS SON, LUCIAN'S *VASALLO* ALEJANDRO.

WE DON'T KNOW. *LA MADRINA* FOUND US! HOPEFULLY THEY MANAGED TO ESCAPE.

YOU'D BEST GET OUT OF HERE TOO!

LET'S GO! HURRY!

YOU! YOU'RE HUMAN!

HOW CAN YOU STAND CONSORTING WITH SUCH MONSTERS?

BEG PARDON, YOUR LORDSHIP. BUT I WAS ONLY A HUMBLE SERVING MAID. AND THESE "MONSTERS" TREAT ME FAR BETTER THAN YOU HUMAN LORDS EVER DID.

HURRY, DON PEDRO. WE HAVE TO FIND ALEJANDRO BEFORE *LA MADRINA* DOES.

KLNK KLNK

THIS WAY!

GET LA REINA TO THE CARRIAGE!

KLNK

SHNNK!

KLNK

STAY HERE!

WHOOSH

SHUNK

AIM FOR HER HEAD! SHE CAN HEAL, LIKE US!

KLNK KLNK

SHLING

SHNNK

SHNNK

HUH.

WHO ARE YOU!

DAMA MECHANIKA.

I CAME TO OFFER MY ASSISTANCE, BUT IT SEEMS YOU HAVE EVERYTHING UNDER CONTROL.

MI REINA! THE BUTCHER IS DEAD!

AND LA DAMA MECHANIKA HAS ARRIVED.

WELL DONE, *ESCOLTAS.*

YOU'VE ELIMINATED A THREAT THAT'S PLAGUED OUR PEOPLE FOR CENTURIES.

DAMA MECHANIKA. YOU RETURNED YOUNG ALEJANDRO TO US. IT WILL NOT BE FORGOTTEN.

THE *BARÓN* CAME WITH ME, FOR HIS SON.

HSSSS...YOU SHOULD NOT HAVE BROUGHT HIM HERE. BUT I SHALL PERMIT HIM TO SAY HIS FAREWELLS.

YOU STILL INTEND TO LEAVE? *LA MADRINA* IS DEAD.

YES, BUT THE DANGER REMAINS. WE HAVE ATTRACTED TOO MUCH ATTENTION IN THIS REGION.

WE SHALL DEPART AS PLANNED AND START ANEW. PERHAPS THE CHILDREN WILL NOW APPRECIATE THE NEED FOR DISCRETION.

ALEJANDRO!
COME, LET'S GET YOU HOME.
NO, *PAPÁ*. THIS IS WHERE I BELONG.
WHAT? YOU BELONG WITH US! WITH YOUR FAMILY, YOUR OWN KIND!
LOOK AT THESE CREATURES! YOUR ***FRIEND***, THIS IS WHAT HE LOOKS LIKE TOO! HE'S A MONSTER!
NO, HE'S NOT! IT DOESN'T MATTER WHAT HE LOOKS LIKE ON THE OUTSIDE. OUR SOULS BELONG TOGETHER.
WE CAN DISCUSS IT AT HOME.
DAMA MECHANIKA, BRING HIM!
HE'S MADE HIS DECISION, DON PEDRO. I CANNOT TAKE HIM AGAINST HIS WILL.
YOU ARE UNDER MY COMMAND! DO NOT FORGET WHO HIRED YOU!
THE BARONESA HIRED ME. TO PROTECT ALEJANDRO, FROM YOU IF NECESSARY. I WILL NOT FORCE HIM.
BAH!
THINK CAREFULLY, ALEJANDRO. IF YOU CHOOSE THIS, IF YOU CHOOSE THESE...THESE *DEMONIOS* OVER YOUR FAMILY, YOU CAN NEVER RETURN.
I'M SORRY, *PAPÁ*.
VERY WELL.
I HAVE NO SON.
COME.
WE ARE YOUR FAMILY NOW.
WHAT--
SMASH
NOOOOO!
WHAT THE BLOODY HELL ***ARE*** YOU?

MUERTE.

GO! I'LL KEEP HER OCCUPIED WHILE YOU ESCAPE!

SHE WON'T BE ABLE TO FOLLOW ONCE WE COLLAPSE THE TUNNEL BEHIND US. WHEN YOU HEAR IT, FLEE!

YOU DON'T NEED TO DO THIS!

KLINK

THESE PEOPLE AREN'T YOUR ENEMY!

KLANK

THE LADY WILL RELEASE YOU FROM HER SERVICE IF YOU WISH IT.

KLANK

AS SHE RELEASED ME.

WHOOSH

YOU CAN REST--

THUD

I CAN NEVER REST UNTIL THE WORLD IS CLEANSED.

THE SOULS OF MY CHILDREN, MY HUSBAND, MY PEOPLE, WILL NEVER REST UNTIL EVERY LAST *SANGRIENTO* IS EXTERMINATED.

IF YOU STAND WITH THE ENEMY, THEN YOU TOO MUST DIE.

KLANK

AHHH!

FWP

KRACK

IF YOU CANNOT LET GO OF THIS BLIND HATRED...

...THEN ***YOU'RE*** THE ONE WHO MUST BE STOPPED!

THWAK

THUMK

KRAK

THWUMP

IT DIDN'T HAVE TO BE THIS WAY!

UNGH!

=GASP!=

OOOMPH!

UNGH...

UGH...

WHOOOSH

FWOOH

THUNK

KRRR

STOP!

LET THE CHILDREN GO!

STRIKE ME DOWN IF YOU MUST, BUT THE CHILDREN ARE INNOCENT.

I HAVE KILLED MANY OF YOUR KIND, IT IS TRUE, AND WHY NOT? YOU WERE BUT ANIMALS RAISED FOR SLAUGHTER IN MY DAY.

BUT THE WORLD HAS CHANGED. OUR YOUNG CONSIDER THE HUMANS THEIR PEERS, NOT THEIR SERVANTS.

PERHAPS IT IS BEST IF MY TIME HAS COME TO AN END. BUT MY SON HAS NEVER HARMED A SINGLE HUMAN.

HE LOVES THEM, YOU CAN SEE IT FOR YOURSELF.

YOU ARE A MOTHER TOO, THEY SAY. LOOK INTO YOUR HEART, LET MY SON--

SHNK!

I HAVE NO HEART.

NOOOOO!

GO...SAVE YOURSELF...YOU CAN GET AWAY...

SHHH...

"DAREST THOU NOW O SOUL, WALK OUT WITH ME TOWARD THE UNKNOWN REGION..."

GET AWAY FROM MY SON!

SZZZL ZZZZ SZZ

KRCKL KRCKL

GREEK FIRE ERADICATES ALL...EVEN THE UNDEAD.

ALEJANDRO! ARE YOU--

MADRE DE DIOS...

SZZL SZZL

...YOU...

...ALL...

KRKL

KRKL

HOW DO YOU STOP IT?!

BLAM BLAM

GO! RUN!

...WILL...

BLAM

SZZL SZZL ZZL

SZZL SZZL SZZL

...DIE!!!

SKUFF

UNGH... ALL RIGHT, YOU BLOODY HELLION... LET'S FINISH TH--

OH BUGGER ME...

BLAM BLAM

SZZL

ZZL

MADRINA!

BLAM

CLK CLK CLK

CHNKT

CHNKT

CHNKT

FSHNNK

KRKL KRKL KRKL KRKL KRKL

KTHNK KTHNK KTHNK

THWMP

THWMP

THWMP

THWMP

THWMP

THWP

FWOOSH

HIJA DEL DIABLO! THAT CREATURE WAS SURELY SPAWNED FROM THE DEPTHS OF HELL! CAN IT RETURN AGAIN?

I AM NOT CERTAIN. BUT WE SHOULD AT LEAST HAVE ENOUGH TIME TO GET AWAY.

SCUFF SCUFF

YOU!

YOU ARE NOT HUMAN.

SHOW US YOUR FACE, *DEMONIO*. YOUR TRUE FACE.

NO! HE CAN'T! HE'S BEEN INJURED.

LUCIAN, YOU DON'T HAVE TO--

IT'S ALL RIGHT, *MI CORAZON*.

ARRGH!

YOU'D RATHER BE WITH THESE *MONSTRUOS* THAN YOUR OWN KIND, YOUR OWN FAMILY? LIVING IN A WORLD SURROUNDED BY ALL THIS DEATH AND DANGER?

NO! I DON'T FIT IN YOUR WORLD, PAPÁ!

LUCIAN'S PEOPLE, THEY PROVIDE A HAVEN FOR THOSE WHO ARE DIFFERENT!

THOSE OF US WHO ***CANNOT*** CONFORM TO SOCIETAL EXPECTATIONS, HOWEVER MUCH WE WISH WE COULD!

HE...HE'LL BE HAPPIER...WITH US... LORD BARÓN...

ALEJANDRO HOLDS...THE OTHER HALF...OF MY SUNDERED SOUL...I WILL GIVE... ***EVERYTHING***...TO KEEP HIM...SAFE...

WELL? WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR? THAT DEMON-SPAWN TO RETURN AND KILL US ALL?

COME! OUR HORSES ARE TETHERED OUTSIDE. WE'LL GET YOU TO YOUR NEW HOME SAFELY.

HE MAY BE A SINNER... HE MAY BE A DEVIANT...

...BUT HE'S STILL MY SON.

THE END

EPILOGUE

DR. LITTLETON?

OH! LADY MECHANIKA! YOU'RE BACK! IT'S SO NICE TO SEE YOU! HOW WAS YOUR TRIP?

IT WAS... *INTERESTING.*

I WAS WONDERING IF YOU MIGHT BE ABLE TO TEST AND COMPARE SOME SAMPLES OF BLOOD?

OH! YES, OF COURSE!

HUH... THIS, *UM,* THIS DOESN'T LOOK LIKE HUMAN BLOOD...

IT'S NOT. IT'S FROM A SUPERNATURAL CREATURE I ENCOUNTERED ON THIS LAST ADVENTURE.

OH! I SEE! DO YOU WANT ME TO COMPARE IT TO HUMAN BLOOD?

NO. I...

I NEED YOU TO COMPARE IT...

...TO *MINE...*

COVER GALLERY

COVER ART BY BRIAN CHING & BETH SOTELO

COVER ART BY MIGUEL MERCADO

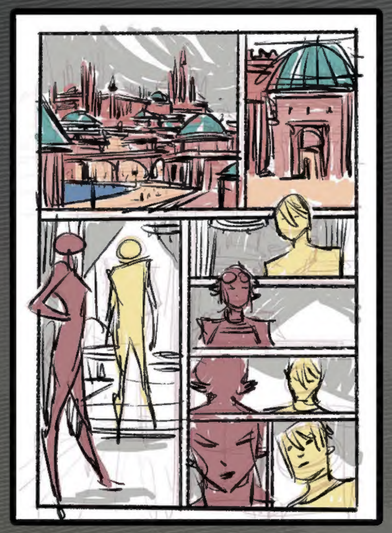
COVER ART BY JESSE WICHMANN & TEVAN

COVER ART BY DAN MENDOZA

An Interview with Brian Ching

Veteran comic artist Brian Ching has worked on a wide variety of titles such as Supergirl, Conan the Avenger, and Star Wars during his career. Now he's tackling steampunk and Lady Mechanika! Check out some of his design sketches and layouts as our production assistant Andria asks him the questions art students and Lady M superfans want to know:

How do you feel about working on Lady Mechanika?
It's exciting. It's scary. Everything you want to feel when working on a good project. It's consistently one of the best books on the shelves. It has an established aesthetic by one of the most popular creators working today. Seriously, my initial gut reaction was I better not screw this up too badly.



What about Lady Mechanika drew you to this project?
The world of Lady Mechanika seems to have endless possibilities. She's a detective that investigates everything and anything dangerous. It has monsters, robots, and so much more. It's such a compelling world to visit. Just a chance to be a part of it is super exciting.

What is your thought process on your interpretation of the character?
I'll be honest, it is very tough to follow Joe. He draws everything so well and has an instantly recognizable style. The first thing I thought is to definitely do my best to NOT copy anything he has done with the book. Very difficult to do but I had to put away all my Lady Mechanika comics. And try to find my own voice with her visuals. I settled on giving her a long and lean appearance – something similar to a cheetah maybe. To make it appear as if she is ready to launch into an attack or pursuit at any moment. Built for speed. After that I just try and get energy on the page. Super easy when there's action actually happening. A little harder when there's exposition but still an opportunity.

What was your first reaction to the script?
Honestly? Panic. But that's normal for me. It's always daunting to jump into a new world that already has a well defined aesthetic. Once the panic subsides, then the excitement and energy can come out. Then it's time to start gathering reference and familiarizing myself with the potential settings and costume designs we'll need to tell the story.

How do you personally relate to this particular concept or character?
I don't want to reveal too much about the story but it does explore elements of discrimination. I think it's something we can all relate to. Being judged by your appearance. It's an important topic to explore so I'm just glad to be a part of telling that story.

You've had the opportunity to work with some pretty amazing and iconic comic book characters. What about Lady Mechanika, in your opinion, separates her from the sea of characters that are out there?
In a strange way it kind of reminds me of Star Wars. It feels fresh and new but at the same time very identifiable. Like we've seen things here before but it's all punched up with a steampunk on steroids kind of vibe. And it's a blend of so many genres – sci-fi, horror, fantasy, mystery, retro tech, 19th century Victorian, action. It provides such an interesting backdrop for her stories. Lady Mechanika herself is a super capable, self sufficient strong character that seems to be able to get out of anything that's thrown her way. She's the most badass character in comics today. I think that's why the readers like her so much.

What things would you like to do with Lady Mechanika, or what direction would you like to go?
I would absolutely love to do a GI JOE: Silent Interlude type story with Lady Mechanika. Completely visual with zero dialogue. To really test my storytelling ability.

As a young artist what is something you wish you knew prior to joining the comic book industry?
How difficult it is. You need to be able to draw many things very quickly. Houses, cars, animals, anything you can think of, just to tell the story.

So how do you approach a page layout? From the minute a company or creator contacts you with an idea, what are some of the crucial steps you take to reach that final product?
I scribble a lot on the script. Make notes, do tiny little sketches. I try and visualize each panel in a widescreen format. So that each panel has equal weight. After that I figure out the panel arrangement and which part of the scene needs the most focus. Lots of trial and error but that's where the page begins to come alive for me.

If there was one piece of advice you could give to your younger self what would it be?
Learn to use color. It's so important to understand color. It will allow you to better tell the story as well as communicate with the color artist.

Describe to me your vision of a good day.
Spending it with my wife. ♥ ♥ ♥

For more Lady Mechanika, please visit:

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Lady Mechanika Titles

LADY MECHANIKA (*The Mystery of the Mechanical Corpse*)
THE TABLET OF DESTINIES
THE LOST BOYS OF WEST ABBEY
LA DAMA DE LA MUERTE (*Day of the Dead Special*)
THE CLOCKWORK ASSASSIN
LA BELLE DAME SANS MERCI
SANGRE

LADY MECHANIKA: STEAMPUNK COLORING BOOK I
LADY MECHANIKA: STEAMPUNK COLORING BOOK II

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Lady Mechanika™

A dark tale that explores the devastating power of love…and hate.

Lady Mechanika journeys to Spain to protect a local Barón's son from an alleged demonic entity, but were the young man's injuries actually caused by supernatural forces, or by illicit experiments conducted by his own father? What sinister secret is the Barón trying to hide, and could it somehow be entangled with Lady Mechanika's past?

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"The story is compelling, mysterious, exciting, and dramatic....New readers will love [Lady Mechanika's] disposition, attitude, and the dark Steampunk world around her. It's a must read!"
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This volume collects the entire five-issue *Sangre* mini-series, featuring a main story drawn by Brian Ching (SUPERGIRL, STAR WARS) and a prologue story drawn by Joe Benitez and Martin Montiel.

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